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The Influence of Coventry Patmore on Francis Thompson

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THE INFLUENCE OF COVENTRY PATMORE ON FRANCIS THOMPSON

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INTRODUCTION

Tracing a single influence through its effects in the thought and works of a poet is a delicate and painstaking task; it is like following a single thread in a magnificent work of tapestry. At times its distinctive coloring is clearly discernible; it is the dominating theme of the pattern. Then again, as the rythmn of the pattern changes, this particular thread retreats to the background and others are emphasized. The whole is the master's artistic arrangement of the varied threads with which he must work. The quality of the materials at his disposal is important to the artist, but the final appreciation of his work depends upon the use he makes of them. In particular is this true of the poet. Instead of threads he works with ideas and words, which are shaped for him by his environment, his associates, and to a great extent by what he reads.

Certain ideas arouse a sympathetic response in the mind of the poet. These ideas are cultivated and a definite pattern emerges in the life's work of the poet. The maze of influences assumes order and coherence, tinging the artist's work with certain distinctive characteristics of subject-matter and style. Some influences are naturally stronger than others and they affect the pattern more decisively. Kinsley Rooker makes this interesting comment on influence. He says:

> ...il y a une influence positive qui laisse des traces définies et faciles a reconnaître dans les oeuvres, et dont le rôle est plutôt d'ajouter une sorte de coloris à la poésie que de la developper, et de faire passer parfois au second plan les sympathies personnelles de l'auteur en mettant dans l'ombre l'originalité de son génie;

> mais il y a aussi une autre influence qui n'est pas soulignée par la critique, et qui pourtant joue un rôle important dans le développement du génie poétique, par cela même qu'elle éveille comme une resistance de la part du poète, en se heurtant à sa propre individualité.[1]

The poet of genius, however, is master of his influence and does not let any one of them overshadow his originality but rather assimilates and transforms all, making them his own.

In attempting to evaluate one such influence, however important it may appear to be, it must be recognized as merely one among many; and as such it can be traced only with difficulty and much caution. Study in this respect of the poets Francis Thompson and Coventry Patmore has proved unusually interesting and rewarding. Here we have two poets who were not only contemporaries but friends. Their interests lay in the same things, the supernatural expressed through nature and the relations of man to God. They met through their mutual friend, Alice Meynell, and were drawn to each other by their uncommon sensitiveness to spiritual values and their appreciation of each other's writings. Their friendship was mainly on an intellectual level according to Father Anselm, a young friar who was at Pantasaph during Thompson's stay there and who later became Archbishop Kenealy of Simla, India. Father T. L. Connolly quotes the Archbishop as saying that "Coventry Patmore and Thompson were intellectually intimate friends, but not friends in the complete sense of

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[1] K. Rooker, Francis Thompson, Herbert and Daniel Co., London, 1913, 98.

the word. There is abundant evidence in Thompson's letters and verses to support the first statement--that Patmore and Thompson were intellectually intimate friends."[2] The flow of influence would naturally be from Patmore, the older, to the younger; from the more widely known and more firmly established poet to the more recent, in comparison only a novice at the work. Not only were age and experience in Patmore's favor, but the very character of the younger poet gave direction to the flow of influence. Francis Thompson is discovered to be possessed of remarkable powers of assimilation and retention. His own father once said, "I cannot imagine where that boy has learned all that he knows."[3] 'That boy' was not beyond acknowledging the sources of his learning and inspiration. His opinion on the subject of influence is enlightening in our efforts to understand the nature and the extent of the influences exerted on his work.

> There is no literary phenomenon more inevitable or without which literature would find it more difficult to exist, than the imitation of one author by another. The majority of instances, no doubt, which pass for deliberate imitation, are the mere result of unconscious cerebration; but even when the imitation is conscious there is no necessary stigma attending it. For the precious metals of the mind are capable of transmutation; and the silver of one writer becomes the gold of another.[4]

Thompson uses the term imitate; yet it is evident he is speaking of the same thing as influence, but from the point of view of receiver or

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2 T. L. Connolly, S.J., Francis Thompson: In His Paths, Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, 1944, 97.

3 T. L. Connolly, S.J., Literary Criticism by Francis Thompson, E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1948, vii.

4 Ibid., 451.

reflector rather than that of source. This statement is significant as an indication of the penetrating perception of Thompson's intellect and also as an indication of his realism. He does not pretend to be independent of influence, but with simple honesty recognizes that much of his accomplishment is "transmutation." Rooker noted this quality in Thompson; not indeed to his detriment, for he undoubtedly made "gold" of what he read. He calls it

> ...la remarquable puissance d'assimilation de Francis Thompson. On ne s'étonnera pas d'apprendre, que les influences qu'il a subies furent nombreuses et variées. Il semble avoir retenu quelque chose de l'esprit de toutes les grandes oeuvres qui s'echelonnent du siècle de Shakespeare jusqu'à nos jours.[5]

It is to be noticed that Rooker states that Thompson retains the "spirit" of these works. It is clear, then, that we are not speaking here of a slavish miming which enhances neither the original nor literature in general. He would be a poor poet, indeed, who was not sensitive to influences "celles de ses predecesseurs comme celles de ses contemporains."[6] A poet is one who is alive to beauty, wherever it may be found. He drinks it in, assimilates it. "Thompson's mind was steeped in the work of other poets, including contemporaries" but nonetheless, "his creative originality could overcome the strongest literary associations."[7] His work contains

> ...nulle atteinte à l'originalité du génie individuel du poète mais au contraire un enrichissement de sa pensée et de sa langue. Car au

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5 Rooker, 99.
6 Ibid., 98.
7 R. L. Mégroz, Francis Thompson: The Poet of Earth in Heaven, Charles Scribners, New York, 1927, 57.

> fond, l'originalité ne consiste pas tant dans la pensée du poème, que dans l'intensité du sentiment qui y est exprimé.[8]

The study of influence is not intended to disparage the efforts of the poet, but rather to enable the reader to have a better understanding of the resulting poems. Wilfrid Meynell, the greatest friend Thompson had, realized this and expressed the same idea in a review he wrote of Thompson's poems.

> Perhaps the affinities of his work are beyond the ordinary reader. One must know something of Crashaw in the Caroline period, of Blake in the Georgian, of Coventry Patmore in the Victorian, fully to appreciate his value—although his work is all his own, anything but a pastiche of remembered phrases and cadences.[9]

One cannot read far in a life of Thompson, or in criticism of his works, without repeatedly coming upon the name of Coventry Patmore. For the most part, these references credit Patmore with being the poet who exerted the greatest influence on Thompson. Mégroz, however, flatly contradicts such opinion and puts forth his own opinion in opposition. "The only deeply significant influences in Thompson's verse are Shelley and Crashaw and Shakespeare and Donne."[10]

While it is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss these influences, it is recognized that they exist; not, as Mégroz would have us believe, to the exclusion of Patmore, but each in his place. Mégroz recognizes the fact that many critics acclaim Patmore's influence but dismisses

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8 Rooker, 99.
9 W. Meynell, "Selected Poems," Athenaeum, January 9, 1909, 37.
10 Mégroz, 59.

them lightly. "The resemblances between Patmore and Thompson are entirely superficial; two poets could hardly be more distinct in temperament and in art."[11]

Coventry Patmore, nonetheless, is a poet whose influence has not yet been fully appreciated. This is not because it has not been recognized, for many critics have acknowledged it, seeing in his poetry the motivating force behind a new school of Catholic poetry. George N. Shuster said that "the contours of Catholic poetry in the modern time are largely of his tracing; and though Francis Thompson is better known, and Father Gerard Hopkins from one point of view greater, Patmore remains the only modern 'poet of the Faith' who cannot be thought out of English literature."[12] That Patmore, a convert, should have influenced Thompson in writing religious poetry may appear strangely inverted. But perhaps that is Patmore's greatest asset, the zeal and freshness of a convert. Father Connolly remarks with regard to the religion of both poets:

> Few men who have inherited their faith from Catholic parents have had a more profound grasp of its teachings or a more intense love of its devotions than Thompson. And few men who have come to that faith through the hard way of Patmore in the full maturity of their powers have used those powers so exclusively as Patmore did to analyze, synthesize, and glorify that faith in its manifestations in life and art.[13]

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11 Ibid., 87.

12 G. N. Shuster, "Patmore, A Revaluation," Commonweal, October 23, 1936, 605.

13 Connolly, In His Paths, 97.

Another critic, B. I. Evans, likewise recognized this contribution of patmore to modern Catholic poetry.

> There arises, as one fresh element, a new religious poetry, Catholic and mystical in motive, removed entirely from the earlier disputes, and owing a spiritual allegiance to the religious poetry of the seventeenth century. Coventry Patmore achieves an additional importance when he is considered as the pioneer of this movement.[14]

Patmore possessed many qualities that fitted him for this leadership. He was religious by nature, even before he assented to the formal dogmas of the Catholic Faith. He was a great intellectual force and a deeply original thinker. It was this last, more than any other quality, which gave him his place of influence. Patmore was daringly original in his subject-matter, singing the glories of wedded love; but his influence is probably greater through his innovations of poetic technique.

We sometimes get the impression that Patmore was a mere exhibitionist, delighting in attracting attention. It is true that he relished notice and appreciation; but his contemporary and biographer, Sir Edmund Gosse, tells us that "He was no propagandist; he made no efforts of any conspicuous kind to communicate his belief to others."[15] Of course, much could depend on Gosse's definition of "conspicuous," but he probably means that, although Patmore was delighted when he found someone who was interested in his

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14 B. I. Evans, English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century, Methuen and Co., London, 1933, xxi.

15 Sir Edmund Gosse, Coventry Patmore, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1905, 246.

ideas, he never attempted to force them on anyone; he preferred to withdraw from the company of the world. "No one understands Patmore who does not comprehend that he lived in a transparent shell, which slowly became impermeable to all elements except light."[16] Frederick Page made a similar statement, but he seemed to infer that Patmore was motivated by caprice rather than principle.

> Coventry Patmore was a man singular enough to be misunderstood, and (both from reticence and whim, or reticence masquerading as whim) to desire to be misunderstood of the many and not fully understood by any but the very few.[17]

Repeated references are made to the fewness of those who really understand and appreciate Patmore's work. While it is true that Patmore's whim had something to do with this, it is likewise true that his thought is mystical and exalted and cannot be appreciated by all. John Freeman said:

> Doubtless they are but few who possess at once the religious purity (the spiritual virginity of Patmore's favorite theme) and the poetic intensity which are equally necessary to a proper apprehension of the full significance and value of these mystic Odes. They are indeed poetry for poets.[18]

No description of Thompson would be accurate without special emphasis on these two qualities of religious purity and poetic intensity. He climbed the heights step by step with Patmore and matched the splendor of his

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16 Sir Edmund Gosse, "Coventry Patmore," Living Age, January 2, 1897, 799.
17 Frederick Page, "Coventry Patmore," Catholic World, June, 1921, 380.
18 J. Freeman, "The Ideas of Coventry Patmore," Living Age, July 18, 1908, 186.

visions with some of his own. Thompson is the outstanding figure among the few who appreciated Patmore. Sir Edmund Gosse gives this explanation of the narrowness of Patmore's influence. "Those who do not feel broadly may have a deep, but they cannot expect to have a wide influence."[19] Doubtless this is true, but Patmore's influence will broaden as the years go on.

> Wherever a critic of faithful conscience recalls the poets of this period—Tennyson, Arnold, Clough, Patmore, Browning, Rossetti—it is on the name of Patmore that he lingers with a sense of lively wonder. The rest have been fully estimated, and their influence, if not exhausted, is predictable. Patmore is still potential.[20]

In his own day Patmore was appreciated by some and criticized by many. Be that as it may, Patmore's was a dominating character, both in personality and in forcefulness of ideas and expression. Francis Thompson, on the other hand, was impressionable and receptive to ideas that complemented his own. It was inevitable, since their paths crossed so often with mutual interests, friends, and religion, that the impressionable be impressed and the dominating dominate. Everard Meynell, in Thompson's biography, says of Patmore's influence on him: "In one case he was an imitator not by choice but by compulsion, a conscript follower. There was no more choice for him in following Patmore than for a son born like his father."[21] Thompson saw in Patmore's works the expression of what had

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19 Gosse, 249.
20 H. Read, Collected Essays, Faber and Faber, London, 1938, 397.
21 Everard Meynell, The Life of Francis Thompson, Burns and Oates, London, 1913, 131.

so long been in his mind; and it gave him courage to write along the same line, as indeed he had already done to a certain extent.

> This will be most readily apprehended in a consideration of the evidence for their sympathetic approach to one another as human beings, and of such poems as betray the influence of the more virile intellect of Patmore over the hero-worshipping friend. No poet was ever less of a hero-worshipper than Coventry Patmore; but what other poet, unless it be Swinburne, was more inclined to this means of symbolizing ideals than Thompson?[22]

Thompson may have been a hero-worshipper and a dreamer, but in the matters of his poetry he knew what he wanted to say. He needed only to be told where to look and he could go on by himself. Rooker reminds us that, although Patmore's influence was great, "N'oublion pas néanmoins que, si grand qu'ait été cette influence, Thompson n'a jamais perdu sa propre individualité qui ressort dans toute sa splendeur à chaque page de ses poésies."[23] And Mégroz adds: "With all his apparent anxiety to admit a debt to Patmore, he was always notably careful to maintain his spiritual independence."[24]

It is interesting to note critical opinion on this problem through the decades which have passed since the publication of Thompson's poems. His contemporaries were conscious of the similarities between his poems and those of Patmore. The Meynells, because of their close associations

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22 Mégroz, 87.
23 Rooker, 138.
24 Mégroz, 92.

with both poets, were probably quicker than others to notice evidences of influence. Alice Meynell preferred the austere poetry of Patmore to the over-rich imagery of Thompson and was very pleased to note the good effect that Patmore had on Thompson in this respect.

> "But Francis Thompson himself," she wrote later, looking back on his poetry, "was soon to learn that these ceremonies of the imagination are chiefly ways of approach, and that there are barer realities beyond, and nearer to the center of poetry itself." It was when she read certain of the Odes of Coventry Patmore that she considered there was this quality in a living poet, a transcendent simplicity beyond imagery, with imagery's 'fervours and splendours put to silence.' And when Francis Thompson wrote his third and last book of poems strongly then under the influence of Patmore and dedicated to him, she thought he took a 'yet higher step in his art and thought' through that influence.[25]

However, in reviewing New Poems she said:

> The influence of Coventry Patmore is somewhat too evident; there is more likeness than there should be between poet and poet in "The Dread of Height," for example; elsewhere that influence was more latent, and all-beneficial.[26]

Everard Meynell, biographer of Thompson, records his impressions of the influence.

> In all the poetry belonging to the period of "The Mistress of Vision" Patmore is the master of vision. He leads the way to 'deific peaks'

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25 Viola Meynell, Alice Meynell, A Memoir, Charles Scribners Sons, New York, 1929, 70.

26 Alice Meynell, "Some Memories of Francis Thompson," Dublin Review, January, 1908, 617.

> and 'conquered skies,' the Virgil of a younger Dante.
>
> Their thoughts chimed to the same stroke of metre and rhyme; for each of the mystical poems may be found suggestions in Patmore.[27]

Thompson did not immediately take to Patmore; he was wary of his influence over him and found quarrel with some of his points of doctrine.

> Religio Poetae, at first a stumbling-block, was to become the corner-stone of his later poetry. Two years before (in August, 1892) he had said there were two points in C. P.'s teaching--as to the nature of the union between God and man in this world and the next and the definition of the constitution of Heaven--that he refused absolutely to accept.... And he had at first only unwillingly admitted Patmore's power over him.[28]

In reading this life of Thompson, we are undoubtedly getting the benefit of the intimate friendship of Everard's parents, Alice and Wilfrid Meynell, and the keenness of their literary criticism. This seems to be particularly true of the penetrating remarks made on the influence of Coventry Patmore. "Patmore may have given Thompson a metre and a score of thoughts, but above everything else he gave him the freedom of his imagination."[29] It must have been very gratifying to the Meynells to have their protege appreciated and encouraged by the older poet; but, above all, they must have delighted in the spark of genius which the contact evoked from their reticent but gifted friend. Something that they had not been able to loose suddenly rushed forth as a result of this new challenge.

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27 E. Meynell, 220.
28 Ibid., 189.
29 Ibid., 221.

Not only the Meynells were aware of evidence of Patmorean influence in Thompson's poems, but not all the comments were favorable. The review of New Poems in Athenaeum was anything but favorable.

> ...while Mr. Thompson has a quite recognizable manner, he has not achieved a really personal style. He has learnt much, not always with wisdom, and in crowding together Cowley, Crashaw, Donne, Patmore, to name but a few of many, he has not remembered that to begin a poem in the manner of Crashaw and to end it in the manner of Patmore, is not the same as fusing two alien substances. Styles he has, but not style.[30]

The reviewer then goes on to single out Patmore's influence.

> Mr. Thompson has a remarkable talent, he has a singular mastery of verse, as the success of his books is not alone in proving. Never has the seventeenth century phrasing been so exactly repeated as in some of his poems. Never have Patmore's odes been more scrupulously rewritten cadence for cadence.[31]

Not all the reviews were as severe as this one, but the name of Patmore is frequently cited.

Lewis Hind, the founder of the Academy, welcomed contributions from the pen of Thompson. "A Thompson article in the Academy gave distinction to the issue. What splendid prose it was!"[32] He, too, noticed the influence of Patmore on Thompson, not so much in his poetry, but in the personal friendship of the two. "...Thompson himself was dominated by the mystical personality of Coventry Patmore. I have heard him speak of no other man with the reverence that he whispered the name of Coventry Patmore, unless it was some great cricketer."[33] This brings out the

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30 "New Poems," Athenaeum, January 12, 1897, 770.
31 Ibid., 771.
32 Lewis Hind, "Poet Journalist," Harper's Weekly, January 18, 1908, 24.
33 Ibid., 24.

hero-worshipping idea mentioned earlier, which was undoubtedly part of Thompson's admiration for Patmore.

Osbert Burdett places the emphasis on religion as the magnetic force which held them together. Of Thompson he says: "...he was a devout Catholic who found more in common with his friend, Coventry Patmore, than with any contemporary poet."[34] Thus among the critics of Thompson's day we have recognition of the influence on three levels; personal attraction, professional admiration, and similar religious tendencies. All three are simultaneous and so wound up in one another that they would be as impossible to unravel as a man's character. Each one seems to be the most important as you are examining it, but all three give us the whole picture of the influence.

Not only Thompson's reviews but Patmore's critics likewise notice a similarity in their works and comment on their friendship. Basil Champneys, the editor of Patmore's memoirs and correspondence, made these statements: "Patmore became acquainted with the poet, Francis Thompson, whose work shows much similarity to his in thought and not infrequently in form."[35] He notes also the immediate friendship that arose upon their meeting. Their meeting took place several years after Thompson had been reviewing Patmore's books and had come to admire his poetry. "F. T. alluded to in the Pantasaph letters is the poet between whom and Patmore there was great sympathy."[36]

Kinsley Rooker makes several pertinent statements regarding the in-

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34 Osbert Burdett, The Beardsley Period, John Lane, London, 1925, 174.
35 Basil Champneys, The Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, George Bell and Sons, London, 1900, I, 342.
36 Ibid., II, 130.

fluence of Patmore on Thompson's works. This French work was written in 1913, six years after Thompson's death, and is interesting for its reflection of the appreciation of Thompson in France. The interest of the French in influence is greater than that of the English; French studies in Chaucer show the same emphasis on influence. Rooker notes the period of Thompson's poetry which shows the effect of Patmore's influence.

> L'influence du XVII^e siècle chez notre poète est plus sensible dans son premier recueil et en particulier dans la série de poemes Love in Dian's Lap que partout ailleurs car ses dérnières oeuvres portaient surtout des traces de l'influence de Coventry Patmore.[37]

Rooker is one of the critics who very definitely assigns to Patmore the place of greatest influence on Thompson.

> De tous les poètes contemporains, cependant, celui qui a exercé sur Thompson la plus grand influence est incontestablement Coventry Patmore. C'est vers le milieu de sa vie que Thompson fit la connaissance de Patmore. Il avait déjà auparavant publié un volume de poèmes, critiqués d'ailleurs par Patmore dans la Fortnightly Review (Ja 1894). Les relations entre les deux poètes devinrent rapidement très étroites, et Thompson fut vite amené à considerer son aîné comme son maître, le critique bienveillant de ses vers. Il avait lui-même une chaude admiration pour les oeuvres de Patmore.[38]

Rooker felt that the personal attraction of Patmore's character was sufficient to explain the influence on Thompson's poems. "Cette étroite sympathie, cette admiration profonde de la part du jeune poète envers son aîné suffisent déjà pour expliquer l'influence que Coventry Patmore exerça sur le développement poètique de Francis Thompson."[39]

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37 Rooker, 157.
38 Ibid., 128.
39 Ibid., 128.

Again Rooker cites evidence of Patmore's influence. "Lorsqu'il fit imprimer son dernier recueil de New Poems Thompson était profondement imbu de l'esprit de Coventry Patmore; c'est là un fait qui ne saurait échapper à quiconque a lu ce volume."[40]

However, it was not only the French who appreciated Patmore's influence on Thompson during this decade immediately after Thompson's death. In 1916 an article on Thompson's notebooks appeared in the Dublin Review. This article noted the frequent mention of Coventry Patmore in these notebooks.

> ...there is one man who figures as a constant notebook companion. Miss the identity of the "C.P." of a score of allusions, and you would still be conscious that he possessed a guardian of his later-day reveries, a counsellor he kept near him even in the face of inspiration; but you would hardly know whether the initials stood for a person or an inspiration, a poet or an angel. They stand for Patmore.[41]

This is high praise, indeed, for one who is purported to have made no conspicuous effort to influence others.

The subject-matter of the poetry of these two poets is such that it would naturally attract the notice and appreciation of religious. Many of the most pertinent criticisms were made by religious who, as it has been said of Patmore's daughter, are what Patmore wrote about. "Certainly his eldest daughter was what he was trying to describe, a soul in love with Love Itself, and completely surrendered to His Will."[42]

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40 Ibid., 135.
41 "The Notebooks of Francis Thompson," Living Age, August 4, 1917, 290.
42 L. Wheaton, "Psyche and the Prophet," Catholic World, December, 1923, 359.

Louisa Wheaton, writing in 1918 recognized "the daring worship of Francis Thompson."[43] She was a member of the same convent as Patmore's daughter and her interest was mainly in Patmore's poems. She said of Thompson: "The Hound of Heaven by Patmore's spiritual disciple can convey some idea of God's pursuing love; but Francis Thompson was a gifted child compared with what he names 'this oceanic vast of intellect'."[44]

With regard to comparison of intellects, perhaps Thompson was only a "gifted child," but a comparison of genius for poetic expression would find many who would disagree with the above statement.

Another nun, Sister Madeleva, recognized the influence that Patmore exerted on Thompson particularly by his "two books, Religio Poetae, in 1893, and The Rod, The Root, and The Flower, in 1895, which became immediately the dominating influence in Thompson's manner of thought and expression. They are the quintessence of this common denominator, mysticism and symbolism, epigrammatic style, boldness in choice and treatment of subject."[45] She is speaking chiefly of Thompson's prose, and it is true that Patmore was instrumental in Thompson turning to prose as practically his only form of expression during the last years of his life.

Another critic of the twenties, R. L. Mégroz, felt that Patmore's influence on Thompson was greatly over-rated. Many of his arguments are sensible, although one cannot help feeling that some, at least, are based.

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43 Ibid., 355.
44 Ibid., 357.
45 Sister Madeleva, "Prose of Francis Thompson," Catholic World, January, 1923, 458.

on a prejudice against Patmore. It is not outstanding enough to be called bias, and at times he is forced to give Patmore his due. "It seems that Thompson owes much more to his other acknowledged source, the liturgies, than to Patmore's poetry, though, as we shall see, he owed a debt to patmore's mind."[46] He refutes Sister Madeleva's statement that Patmore became the dominating influence in Thompson's manner of expression. "In the profusion and ornateness of language his style is in marked contrast to that of Mrs. Meynell and of his friend Coventry Patmore."[47] This was true of an early period of his writing, but it is likewise true that both Alice Meynell and Patmore discouraged this habit of ornateness of language, and his later works show an improvement in this respect.

Mégroz, however, who is out to prove his point, is discouraged by nothing, not even the avowed acknowledgement of the influence of Patmore by Francis Thompson himself. Mégroz discounts Thompson's word as being of no consequence because "Thompson himself appears to be more conscious of it [artistic influence] than a true poetic disciple would be."[48]

Mégroz evidently regards as valid only that influence of which the poet is unconscious. Thompson, dreamer and mystic that he was, was more realistic about his poetry than his critic. Originality does not determine the worth of the coin, but rather the ring of the "gold" into which the poet has transmuted the basic material he used. Poetic alchemy is a secret

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47 Ibid., 29.
48 Ibid., 89.

only the greatest possess, with Shakespeare the master of them all.

The stream of criticism which links the names of Patmore and Thompson continued without break. Patrick Braybrooke, writing in the thirties, noted in the influence of Patmore a source of faults which he criticized in Thompson. "Consequently it has been said, as it was said so much more firmly of Patmore, that he Thompson was at times obscure."[49] The influence of Patmore encouraged Thompson to soar ever higher above the mere earthbound critics and as a result, not understanding him, they reacted unfavorably. No one but a Catholic can really understand Thompson's poetry -- and similarly Gerard Manley Hopkins' -- and he must be a Catholic whose spiritual eyes are open to the supernatural truths of his Faith.

B. I. Evans is again most definite in his statement of the problem.

> Among those who owe allegiance to Coventry Patmore none is more openly a disciple than Francis Thompson, and though their work comes to differ widely in content and poetic skill, Patmore consistently welcomed the association of his name with that of Thompson.[50]

This favorable reaction of Patmore to the association of his name with Thompson's broadens the picture of their friendship. Patmore was flattered by the adulation of the promising young poet and happy to find someone who spoke his language both poetically and mystically.

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49 Patrick Braybrooke, Some Victorian and Georgian Catholics, Burns, Oates and Washbourne, London, 1932, 70.

50 Evans, 147.

The greatest Thompson collection today outside of that possessed by Wilfrid Meynell, is under the care of Father T. L. Connolly, S.J. at Boston College. Father Connolly has devoted much time and labor to a study of Francis Thompson and his works. His books on Thompson are full of references to Patmore's influence; he likewise brings in the name of Alice Meynell as a great inspiration; "the two poets to whom he [Thompson] owed his greatest inspiration and influence--Alice Meynell and Coventry Patmore."[51] Mrs. Meynell was not only an inspiration in whom Thompson saw the perfection of woman, but Thompson admired her skill at writing.

> ...his clear thinking is expressed in language of acknowledged indebtedness to Mrs. Meynell, whose subtleties of thought and expression he so admired, and to Coventry Patmore, whom he found 'rich enough to lend to the poor,' in more than poetry.[52]

Father Connolly brings up to the present the critical thought which credits Patmore with being the greatest influence on Thompson. Far from being weakened, the claims of Patmore's contemporaries for recognition of his influence have rather been strengthened by time and searching study. Father Connolly unequivocally stated: "The poet who exerted the greatest influence upon Thompson in his effort to be the poet of the Return to God was undoubtedly Coventry Patmore."[53]

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51 Connolly, In His Paths, 80.
52 Connolly, Criticisms, 419.
53 Connolly, In His Paths, 65.

This quotation, which is representative of most of the critical opinion on the subject, brings this study up-to-date chronologically, but critically it merely complements the opinion of Thompson's contemporaries of fifty years ago.

Though brief, this account presents proof that there is sufficient evidence for initiating an investigation of the influence so frequently mentioned. The most convincing evidence, of course, is that given by Thompson himself. His open references to the similarities, conscious and unconscious, between his poems and those of Patmore, arouse our interest. Questions immediately arise as to why and how this influence was exerted; what the contacts were, personal and otherwise, which fostered it; to what extent the influence is evident in Thompson's writings; and how important this influence is for a better understanding and appreciation of Thompson's works.

It is the purpose of this thesis to search out the answers to these questions by means of a comparison of the poems and prose writings of Coventry Patmore with those of Francis Thompson.

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

> There has passed away the greatest genius of the century, and from me a friend whose like I shall not see again; one so close to my own soul that the distance of years between us was hardly felt, nor could the distance of miles separate us.[1]

These words, written by Francis Thompson on the death of Coventry Patmore, give us the keynote of the brief but intense friendship between the two poets. Thompson was acutely conscious, not only of the sympathetic vibrations aroused by Patmore in his own soul, but also of a sense of discipleship toward this prophet of a new and daringly spiritual doctrine. Although he was, indeed, a favored disciple, sharing the most sublime of the master's thoughts; he, nonetheless, regarded Patmore with an air of reverence as "the greatest genius of the century."

Who is it that evokes such praise from one who is himself a renowned poet? Others, indeed, especially of his contemporaries, could find nothing in Patmore worthy of such praise. Most of the critics "treated him as a minor poet, a chicken clucking between Tennyson's feet, a mote dancing in Ruskin's way."[2]

This lack of appreciation on the part of his contemporaries resulted from Patmore's failure to conform to the ideals of the period in which he was writing. It was a matter of principle with him, not to deviate from

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1 E. Meynell, 176.
2 J. Freeman, "Coventry Patmore," Quarterly Review, July, 1923, 125.

his inspiration; for he believed that there existed "an absolute incompatibility between genius and any kind of insincerity."[3] He was extremely careful to maintain his literary conscience and always wrote in the awareness of his responsibility to his readers and to his inspiration.

> I have written little, but it is all my best; I have never spoken when I had nothing to say, nor spared time or labour to make my words true. I have respected posterity, and should there be a posterity which cares for letters, I dare to hope it will respect me.[4]

posterity must respect him, at least, for his courage in following his ideals even though they were in direct opposition to those of his age. He knew that he must pay the price of loneliness, that he would be unpopular and an outcast from the society of those who were in the right tradition. Patmore, however, would write nothing except what came from his heart.

> Patmore's vein of poetry was narrow, and it dipped deeply into the roots of his nature; it became increasingly difficult to bring the authentic material to the light. Meanwhile he had no sort of inclination to produce poetry which did not come from the depth.[5]

Here was a quality that would appeal to Francis Thompson. He could admire a poet who wrote, not for public acclaim, but because he was moved by an impulse which he could not resist. Thompson must have known something

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3 H. Read, 317.
4 E. Gosse, 184.
5 P. Lubbock, "Coventry Patmore," Quarterly Review, April, 1908, 365.

of the same urgent desire for expression when he could write poetry of mystical beauty while in a state of dereliction on the streets of London. Reverence for his art appeals to any serious poet, and what Arthur Symons said of Patmore, could easily have been said by Thompson:

> What meant more to me than anything he said, though not a word was without its value, was the profound religious gravity with which he treated the art of poetry, the sense he conveyed to one of his own reasoned conceptions of its immense importance, its divinity.[6]

Dates do not tell us much of the man whose life they encompass. To know the living man, we must know his thoughts and aspirations; we must know how he affected those with whom he and his ideas came into contact. This reaction reveals the inner man; but dates do serve the purpose of more definitely locating the man under study in relation to other figures of interest and importance in his age. For instance, it sharpens the outlines of the problem before us to know that Patmore was born in 1823,[7] and that he was thirty-six when Thompson was born in 1859.[8] A further coinciding of their dates shows that Patmore's first poems and his first marriage were previous to Thompson's birth. Patmore's second book of poems, The Angel in the House, preceded Thompson's birth by five years, and in turn, when Thompson was five, in 1864, Patmore entered the Catholic Church. Despite the great difference

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6 A. Symons, Figures in Several Centuries, Constable and Co., London, 1916, 365.

7 Dates and biographical material on Patmore are taken from E. Gosse, Coventry Patmore, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1924.

8 Dates and biographical material on Thompson are taken from E. Meynell, The Life of Francis Thompson, Burns and Oates, London, 1913.

in their ages, they were both little children in the eyes of Mother Church, learning at her knees truths which one day would redound to her glory. The year of the publication of Patmore's Unknown Eros, 1877, Thompson rather unwillingly left his preparation for the priesthood to take up medical studies. He failed at these completely in 1884, and at the age of twenty-five was finally free to devote himself to his writing. Principle in Art, Patmore's first prose, was published in 1889, the year that saw the saving presence of Wilfrid Meynell enter into the life of Francis Thompson. No longer plodding the London streets, but varying his time between the Meynell's home in Palace Court and the monasteries at Storrington and Pantasaph, Thompson found voice for his new-found hope and freedom in the poetry which seemed to pour forth from him at this time. His first book, Poems, was published in 1893, almost fifty years after the first poems of Patmore, and the same year as Patmore's prose work, Religio Poetae. The two poets finally met in 1894 at Pantasaph and were immediately attracted to one another.

In 1895, Thompson's Sister Songs and Patmore's last work, The Rod, The Root, and The Flower, were published; and Patmore died the following year in his seventy-third year. Thompson was thirty-seven at the time and had just dedicated his second volume, New Poems, to his friend. During the last ten years of his life, after Patmore's death, he wrote no poetry, but spent his time writing prose articles

and reviews and the Life of St. Ignatius Loyola, which was published posthumously. His life gradually ebbed out and he died in his forty-eighth year, November 13, 1907.

Thus briefly, are the coinciding dates of the two poets whose personal friendship lasted only two years; and yet, whose reaction to each other's ideas and literary expression was so dynamic that its results can be traced today. In many ways the lives of these two poets have many parallel incidents in which a foreshadowing of their eventual affinities may be seen. In many other ways, equally essential, differences are so apparent that it is amazing that they ever arrived at a common ground.

In the matter of education, Patmore had the advantage over Thompson; not in the number of years of formal training, for Patmore had only about six months of formal schooling in Paris. Yet, as a precocious child, he progressed rapidly under the supervision of his father who tutored him, developed his natural ardor for poetry, and guided his reading along the lines of the Classics. He tells us that his father had formed the habit of marking his books:

> ...profusely underscoring whatever he thought of paramount excellence. 'I took a pride,' said Coventry, 'in reading none but the marked passages, and so in gorging on the quintessence of poetry.' To this early practice, we may trace, perhaps, his greatest fault as a writer, his inadequate sense of the necessity of evolution in poetic work.[9]

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9 E. Gosse, "Coventry Patmore," Living Age, January 2, 1897, 796.

This type of education would naturally have its failings, but it is better calculated to produce a poet than the type of education sustained by Francis Thompson. Thompson was surfeited with formal education, intended to produce a specialized result, definitely not a poet. Seven years of Thompson's education were spent in preparation for the priesthood. This was partly because of the wish of his parents, who were both converts. Mrs. Thompson, herself, had entered the convent but left upon discovering she had no vocation for that life. She was probably over-anxious to see her son fulfill the desire that had been in her heart. Although Thompson was devout and well-liked by his teachers and directors, he was advised to give up the idea of the priesthood. The letter the priest wrote to his mother telling her of the decision remarks: "If he can shake off a natural indolence which has always been an obstacle with him, he has ability to succeed in any career."[10] The "indolence" disappeared when he entered upon his literary career, as can be seen by the amount of work he accomplished in a comparatively short life.

Both of the poets suffered a period of estrangement from their families. Patmore was only twenty-one when his father fled to the continent in financial disgrace, leaving him alone after a very sheltered boyhood. He left just as success seemed about to crown

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10 E. Meynell, 25.

his son's literary efforts, with the publication of his first poems.[11] Herbert Read finds in this trial in the young man's life an explanation of the fierceness of character for which Patmore is so often criticized. "Such circumstances are bound to produce in a sensitive nature 'defense' compensations which take on the appearance of self-assertion and intellectual arrogance."[12]

Contrary to common opinion, Patmore was not greatly helped in his literary career by his father, nor by his father's reputation.

> Peter Patmore's attitude in the Scott duel had produced in his [Thackeray's] own mind, as in that of many others, a violent prejudice against the very name. During the years when practical help would have been valuable to Coventry Patmore, at all events, his father had none to give him ... that Peter Patmore's literary connections made living by the pen any easier for his young son is a fiction which must be corrected.[13]

The poems had been inspired by Patmore's admiration for Tennyson, and their publication attracted the attention not only of this illustrious poet, but also, of Barry Cornwall, Leigh Hunt, Browning, and others. The most practical help Patmore received was from his new friend, Monckton Milnes, later Lord Houghton, to whom Patmore was extremely grateful for a position in the British Museum.[14] This fortunate event brought to a close, after about fifteen months, a period of worry and

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11 E. Gosse, 43.
12 Read, 316.
13 E. Gosse, Living Age, 795.
14 Ibid., 798.

privation for Patmore. At one time he was almost in a state comparable to the destitution of Thompson.

Thompson was twenty-six when his father tired of financing an education that his son was not exerting much effort to assimilate. He finally realized that his son was not going to follow the vocation of either his mother or his father, but the one to which God called him. Thompson left home, however, of his own free will and set out for London as the most likely place to earn his living.

His period of trial was just about twice as long as Patmore's and twice as hard. He stooped to things that Patmore would never have done: shoe shining, selling matches, holding horses, and the like. After three years of this, Thompson was rescued by Wilfrid Meynell and set upon a new road.[15] We have seen that Patmore's reaction to insurmountable obstacles was one of disdain and arrogance. His pride forced him to hide his feelings and present a bold and indifferent face to the world. Thompson, on the other hand, even more sensitive than Patmore, found his only solace within himself.

> His sensitive nature recoiled on contact with the world and forced him to flee into 'the tower of his own soul' and raise the drawbridge. ...In most cases, however, time and conflict mold even the most sensitive boy into a rugged individual, fully capable of defending himself physically or diplomatically. This was not true of Thompson. He never lost his sensitiveness.[16]

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15 E. Meynell, 38.

16 J. Barry, "The Child Who Never Grew Up," Commonweal, December, 1945, 188.

It was well for the poetic spirit of Thompson that he turned within himself, and that there he found dreams and ideals to cling to. This saved him from despair and degrading worldly solace, and gave to the world his beautiful mystical poetry.

The poets differed in yet another way in that Thompson was born into the Catholic Church and Patmore came to it as the logical, formal culmination of the spiritual experiences he had. Patmore's early life gives no hint of his later conversion. "Until I was about eleven years old, I was what is now called an 'Agnostic', that is, I neither knew nor cared whether there was a God or no."[17] He got no religious training or encouragement from his father, who was an atheist, and who determined to raise his boy likewise until he would be old enough to choose for himself. Nonetheless, an extraordinary idea of religion pursued Patmore through the whole of his life. As a young boy he meditated on the existence of God, vaguely desiring what he did not know was actually attainable. No doubt the year Patmore spent in Paris when he was fourteen deepened his religious instincts and planted the seed of his conversion.[18] A boy with such a deeply religious sensitivity could not be exposed to a Catholic atmosphere without being impressed by the beauty of the symbolism of its liturgy and the imagery of the ceremonies.

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17 Champneys, II, 41.
18 Ibid., 48.

Regarding Patmore's conversion, it has been said that the Puritanism of his first wife kept him out of the Catholic Church until her death, but Patmore was too independent to be influenced to such a great extent by anyone. Likewise, it is not true that his second wife brought him into the Church, "for his mystical aspirations had already and unconsciously made him a Catholic."[19] Both poets, as they wrote, drew heavily from the symbolism of the Old Testament, unearthing treasures long hid from the eyes of the faithful. They likewise drew from the mystics deep spiritual glories, which made strange company for scientific factual data and Victorian superficialities. They were alike in their selectiveness, choosing to write only about the religious significances which meant so much to them. It is probably in this religious spirit that they are basically most alike.

Patmore married three times, actually living the life of nuptial love which his poetry proclaimed as a forerunner of heaven. His wives had a certain influence on him, and each left her stamp on his work. This is especially true of Patmore's first wife, Emily Andrews.[20] Some of the most interesting criticism of The Angel in the House centers around her. Her Puritan instincts were a check on Patmore's mystic tendencies, forcing him more or less to conform to the conventions

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19 H. O'Keefe, "Coventry Patmore," Catholic World, August, 1899, 650.
20 E. Gosse, 199.

of the period. How well she succeeded is seen in the great misunderstanding with which his poem was greeted. It was widely acclaimed because the public did not realize what he was saying, so well did he veneer his thought with a shell of nineteenth century respectability.

> It cannot be overemphasized that The Angel in the House is a period poem. It cannot be denied that Patmore's hand wrote it. The only explanation for its writing is that in writing it Patmore was paying the price of his love. It was Patmore's sacrifice that he became a period poet because he loved a period woman. For a passion that was purely love, Patmore sacrificed, for a time, the very driving force of his artistic soul.[21]

To a certain extent, no doubt, this is true; and yet, at this period of his life, before the Catholic faith opened to him the mystical vistas of Divine Love, earthly love was the driving force of his life. Respect and reverence for human love soon elevated Patmore's gaze to the ceaseless activity of Divine Charity.

Patmore's second marriage furthered his literary career by giving him a companion whose thoughts complemented his own. Marianne Byles,[22] a convert, like himself, to Catholicity, helped him by her holiness and depth of spirituality. She, at one time, contemplated entering the convent and her vision of the supernatural was always remarkable.

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21 V. T. Eaton, S.J., "The First Mrs. Patmore," Catholic World, October, 1946, 54.

22 E. Gosse, 204.

she began a translation of St. Bernard on The Love of God which Patmore finished.

If she did not introduce Patmore to the Spanish mystics, at least she could intelligently and sympathetically converse with him about them. It was during this second marriage that Patmore wrote The Unknown Eros, "the loveliest and most poignant, the most purely compact of essential poetry."[23] Of The Unknown Eros, one critic writes:

> The author of the Odes was an intensely religious, spiritually motivated man. He wrote a series of poems so great that his own generation, his bigoted, complacent contemporaries, with characteristic blindness could not see them; with characteristic stubbornness, would not hear them. They are a contribution to the literature of the world.[24]

Patmore's third wife, Harriet, is the least known and had the least influence on his work.[25] Shortly after his marriage to her, Patmore announced his intention of writing exclusively in prose.

F. Page has aptly summed up the critics' evaluation of the relationship of Patmore's wives to his work.

> They would have Patmore to be very domestic while he was married to Emily (1847-62), and while he wrote in eight-syllable quatrains or couplets; and to be very religious (but 'mystical' is the word) while he was married to Mary (1864-80), and wrote in lines of varied lengths, rhymed at irregular intervals. I do not know what they would suggest for his latest development, when he was married to Harriet (1881-96), and wrote in prose.[26]

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23 L. Garvin, "Coventry Patmore: The Praise of the Odes," Fortnightly, February, 1917, 207.
24 Eaton, 53.
25 E. Gosse, 243.
26 F. Page, Patmore, A Study in Poetry, Oxford University Press, London, 1933, 18.

Thompson never married, but when his poetic muse inspired him, he dedicated his poetry to Mrs. Meynell and her daughters; so he was not without feminine inspiration for his poetry. Alice Meynell had for him in his need "the care of the mother for the child, the guidance of a Beatrice for a Dante, whose Beatrice she was in poetry."[27]

Both poets wrote sparingly, careful to maintain their integrity of spirit and inspiration. Both ended their literary careers writing only in prose, because they preferred to "respect posterity" and write only what their poetic muse impelled them to write. Thompson had no other work but that of writing; and even about this as a source of livelihood, he was peculiarly indifferent.

> Thompson wrought his poems, but there his impulse and energy ceased. He was a babe in the business of the world, or, rather, he was supremely indifferent. Not only did his friend fee, clothe, and harbor him, but he also found a publisher, and saw that his books were introduced to the few and fit.[28]

The friend is, of course, Wilfrid Meynell, and it was for him that Thompson wrote much of his literary criticism in his later years.

Patmore, on the contrary, needed some steady income to support the large family he had. He worked for twenty years in the British Museum and then retired on a pension. His second wife's great wealth afforded him much leisure, but he did not feel that this aided his literary output. In a letter to Lord Houghton, the man who obtained for him his position in

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27 A. Tuell, Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation, E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1925, 206.
28 Hind, 24.

the British Museum, some twelve years after his retirement, Patmore wrote: "The absolute leisure which of late years I have 'enjoyed,' I have found to be very adverse to literary productions. I should probably have done ten times more in that way if I had had something else to do...."[29]

In personality the poets could hardly have been more different. Patmore was fiercely aggressive, arrogant, proud; Thompson, on the other hand, was meek, unobtrusive, and diffident. Both suffered from the same sensitivity, but their reactions were the opposite. In every description of Patmore some mention is made of his fierceness of manner and his pride, which are generally taken to be qualities of his genius. Symons speaks of "all that was abrupt, fiery, and essential in the genius of a rare and misunderstood poet."[30] Being misunderstood, Patmore scorned the world and refused to mingle with those beneath him. "Poor and proud, and always ready to deem himself undervalued, Patmore did not go much into society."[31]

Theodore Maynard holds this arrogance and scorn to be only a pose to protect himself from critics:

> The prophet's fierceness of manner was necessary to prevent him being charged with being too dainty and sugary. In mere self-defense the poet had to offset this with intimidating growls and glares. The famous arrogance probably at bottom amounts to little more than that.[32]

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29 Champneys, II, 227.
30 Symons, 351.
31 R. Garnett, "Recollections of Coventry Patmore," Saturday Review, December 5, 1896, 582.
32 Maynard, 248.

This arrogance was not objectionable to those who really knew Patmore. They realized that the intense emotion that made his poetry great, when carried over into personal life, often gave rise to annoying eccentricities of manner. Arthur Symons said, "Coventry Patmore charmed one by his whimsical energy, his intense sincerity, and, indeed, by the childlike egoism of an absolutely self-centered intelligence."[33] This statement, while giving us a contemporary's intimate view of Patmore, is not completely true. If Patmore had been "absolutely self-centered," he would never have been able to write of mystical truths which are so far above and beyond the individual man, Coventry Patmore. It is true he was deeply concerned with the thoughts entrusted to him to give to the world; it is true he shunned those to whom his message meant nothing; but that he did so out of pride and egotism is another matter. Theodore Maynard's opinion is that Patmore was not proud, but humble.

> The fact that he became a Catholic would itself show that he was basically humble. So would his pathos, in which quality (or in the power to express it) he has perhaps never been excelled. His confidence was not so much in Coventry Patmore as in the truth, whatever may have been his exalted estimate of his own position as a prophet of truth.[34]

Even in his old age, Patmore did not entirely lose his air of independence, but it was more tempered with kindliness. Edmund Gosse wrote of a visit to Patmore: "The old poet," he wrote to Thornycroft,

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33 Symons, 352.
34 Maynard, 254.

"is very genial and most interesting, with a fresh and original mind, with strong individual sides which come out in unfamiliar forms of prejudice."[35]

Thompson's personality did not have a chance really to develop; it was stultified by the deadening influence of laudanum. In trying to overcome this habit he was subject to periods of despondency and misery; and when the effort of self-denial and self-control in this regard was not necessary, he was concealing the pain of ill health. Consequently, his circle of friends was small, and he had no worldly interests outside of them.

With these friends, although he was naturally shy and retiring, Thompson could forget himself to become either an amusing conversationalist or a garrulous bore. Patmore believed him to be a fluent talker. He wrote from Pantasaph: "I spend part of my day with Francis Thompson, who is a delightful companion, full of the best talk."[36] Unlike Patmore, Thompson was careful never to hurt anyone; he never spoke as dogmatically as Patmore even though he felt very strongly on the subject discussed. This thoughtfulness of others is reflected, too, in his love for children. He was one of them, sharing their dreams and their simple joys. He possessed one quality, however, that was not child-like, and that was the spirit of despondency which sometimes weighed him down. He would frequently write to Wilfrid Meynell letters with sentiments similar to the following:

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35 Evan Charteris, The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse, William Heinemann, London, 1931, 742.

36 Champneys, II, 133.

> Indeed, I feel that you have already done too much for me; and that it would be better you should have nothing more to do with me. You have already displayed a patience and tenderness with me that my kindred would never have displayed; and it is most unjust that I should any longer be a burden to you. I think I am fit for nothing; certainly not fit to be any longer the object of your too great kindness. Please understand that I am perfectly resigned to the ending of an experiment which even your sweetness would never have burdened yourself with, if you could have foreseen the consequences.[37]

Needless to say, we owe an immense debt of gratitude to Wilfrid Meynell for never taking Thompson at his word, and for the tact and patience with which he treated him. He saw, as no one else ever shall, the reasons for Thompson's despondency and the delicacy of spirit and body with which he was equipped to withstand them. What a contrast to Patmore's self-assurance and bold declaration of his slightest whims. Whatever the similarity of inner sensitivity, the exterior could hardly have been a more striking contrast.

The Meynells and their magazine, Merry England, played a big part in the lives of Patmore and Thompson separately, and also in their meeting and subsequent friendship. Coventry Patmore, in his capacity of reviewer, was acquainted with Alice Meynell's work and praised it as early as 1874. When she and her husband started publishing Merry England in 1883, Patmore was one of the first contributors.[38] Thompson

37 V. Meynell, 105.
38 E. Meynell, 65.

met the Meynells in 1889; and after their friendship had developed, he told them that he had read Merry England as a medical student in Manchester practically from its first issue. The fact that his uncle, Edward Healy Thompson, was one of its early contributors probably served to introduce it to him. He said of its editor, Wilfrid Meynell, "I was myself virtually his pupil and his wife's long before I knew him. He has in my opinion--and opinion of long standing--done more than any man in these latter days to educate Catholic literary opinion."[39] Merry England, then, was probably the first place where Thompson saw any of Patmore's work.

Before their first meeting these two poets became more and more aware of each other through their respective works which appeared in Merry England and other magazines, and especially through their friendship with Alice Meynell. While they had nothing but admiration for each other's work, each was somewhat suspicious of the regard in which the other was held by Mrs. Meynell. Nonetheless, nothing could destroy the affection they felt for her and the desire to like what she liked in an effort to please her.

It was easy for them to miss meeting at the Meynell's home because Thompson was never prompt about his arrivals. On one occasion Alice Meynell wrote to Thompson: "I have been much disappointed at not having the opportunity of introducing you to Coventry Patmore.

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39 Ibid., 67.

He wished so much to see you. If you knew the splendid praises he crowned you with."[40]

These 'splendid praises' were in the article written by Patmore, about the first book of poems that Thompson wrote. This is the article, written in January, 1894, which caused critics to say: "To Mr. Coventry Patmore belongs the credit of having 'discovered' Mr. Francis Thompson, whose first and only volume of verses came with all the shock of a complete surprise on the world of readers."[41]

Patmore recognized the qualities of genius in Thompson's poetry and predicted for him early success. "Unlike most poets of his quality, who have usually had to wait a quarter of a century or more for adequate recognition, this poet is pretty sure of a wide and immediate acknowledgement."[42]

How did these two men, so different in personal characteristics, react to one another when they finally met? Thompson met Patmore personally for the first time in 1894. At this time Thompson was thirty-three years old and Patmore was seventy-one. Patmore's phenomenally successful The Angel in the House had been published before Thompson's birth, which may account for the air of reverence and high esteem with which he speaks of Patmore. Of Patmore's first visit to him at Pantasaph, Thompson wrote to Alice Meynell:

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40 E. Meynell, 102.
41 "The Younger Poets," Living Age, February 23, 1895, 479.
42 C. Patmore, "F. Thompson, A New Poet," Fortnightly Review, January, 1894, 19.

"I have had a charming visit with Mr. Patmore. He bore himself towards me with a dignity and magnaminity which are not of this age's stature."[43] He came to Thompson from another world, enveloped in the robes of dignity and reputation, inspiring the young disciple to cry: "Master, where dwellest thou?" It was not only the prophet's personal magnetism that drew the young writer after him; but his spiritual message so appealed to Thompson that he found himself led out to depths he had not dreamed of, walking on the waters of deeper spiritual union with God. Is it too much to say that Thompson would never have found the waves solid beneath his feet without the steadying touch of the master's hand? Thompson himself seems to have felt this:

> To a passage of St. John he adds a note that reveals his mood: "Amen, Amen, I say to thee: when thou was younger, thou didst gird thyself, and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and lead thee where thou wouldst not."
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> To this he adds: 'Apply to spiritual maturity.'[44]

Thompson died young, but he reached a spiritual maturity beyond his years because of the influence of the experience of Patmore. Theodore Maynard had something of the same idea when he said: "His [Patmore's] greatness lies in the power he has over the minds of those willing to read him attentively and with understanding. The very

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43 E. Meynell, 142.
44 Ibid., 142.

shape of such minds he is able to change, for he comes upon them with the force of revelation."[45] Thompson's mind was already shaping along the same lines as Patmore's and did not need to be changed as much as the ideas needed to be crystallized. He was moving slowly and cautiously, and Patmore urged him to run in the way.

Patmore wrote of their first visit to his wife, Harriet:

> Yesterday (Sunday) was Mrs. Meynell's day "at home"....I saw Francis Thompson yesterday and had some private talk with him. All I saw in him was pleasant and attractive--so I asked him to come for some Sunday to Lymington, which he joyfully promised to do.[46]

Thompson wrote later of the friendship the two formed:

> Though never a word on either side directly touched or explained the exceptional nature of the proposal, it was well understood between us--by me no less than by him--that it was no common or conventional friendship he asked of me. Not therefore has he sought out my Welsh hermitage; and scalpelled the fibres of me.[47]

Their letters to one another, indeed, rarely touched on ordinary matters of friendship, but were a more spiritual correspondence with the pupil submitting his work and his ideas for correction and clarification. In one of his letters, Thompson wrote to Patmore:

> Of course, I am quite aware that it is impossible to answer openly--indeed impossible to ask openly--deeper matters in a letter. But that is not requisite in my case. It is enough that my gaze should be set in the necessary direction; the

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45 Maynard, 248.
46 D. Patmore, Portrait of My Family, Harper and Bros., New York, 1935, 242.
47 E. Meynell, 142.

> rest may be safely left to the practised fixity of my gazing.[48]

Thus we see that Thompson is not a fawning disciple, but a sincere and earnest younger prophet, eager to bring his own message to the world. Patmore respected the individuality of Thompson's genius and did not try to superimpose on it his own. He would not have succeeded because in this the usually passive Thompson was unusually prepossessed and determined. Patmore, however, found his happiness in their friendship in the fact that they were able to communicate their ideas to one another with the safe knowledge of complete understanding. He wrote to Thompson in August, 1895: "I see, with joy, how nearly we are upon the same lines, but our visions could not be true were they quite the same; and no one can really see anything but his own vision."[49]

Some of the criticism written about the two poets' works is interchangeable, being said first about one and then about the other until it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell which poet, unless directly named, is being criticized. A universal prophecy is that neither of the poets would be widely read. C. L. Hind wrote:

> The masses will never care for Thompson's poetry. It is too strange, too gorgeous, too mystical, too secret, too overcharged with imagery and the symbolism of his faith. But master it, and the soaring, plunging, uncontrollable Thompsonian song becomes a possession forever.[50]

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48 Ibid., 145.
49 Ibid., 165.
50 Hind, 24.

Alice Meynell comments, with somewhat more restraint, on the same quality of Patmore's poetry, although she ascribes it to a different reason.

> Whatever criticism may learn in time to come, 'The Unknown Eros' will hardly then have many readers, and will no doubt still keep the accidental loveliness that surrounds it now by the indifference of the majority; but its essential loveliness is its own quality, conferred by no world's neglect.[51]

The religious spirit, excessive in the eyes of the world, was the reason for the selectness of the audience which these poems attracted. John Freeman expressed this very well in an article on Patmore which applies equally to Thompson's poetry.

> Certain of the poems are most fitly to be read after a chapter of a Kempis or St. Francis de Sales; while others form an incidental commentary upon the most marvellous passages of St. Augustine's "Confessions"--that one, for example, beginning, "What do I love when I love thee?"[52]

The most frequent name besides poet bestowed upon Patmore and Thompson is that of prophet. Perhaps it was given to Patmore more often, and with more justice, than to Thompson, but they both deserve the significant inferences implied in the title. "Thompson was at times a prophet poet in the real sense of that combination.... A man who knows the heart of God knows also the horizons of life."[53]

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51 A. Meynell, "The Poetry of Coventry Patmore," Athenaeum, December 12, 1896, 839.

52 J. Freeman, 185.

53 F. Smith, "Francis Thompson: Some Sort of Derelict," Catholic World, January, 1943, 432.

They were showing men the way out of the evils of their age, the "Return to God" from laxity of their ways. For their own generation, at least, they were but the "voice of one crying in the wilderness." "The latest and the fiercest of our English prophets," as Gosse called Patmore, was not able to stir the hearts of many; he was "...a sign of contradiction until the end of time. Prophet, poet, mystic, Coventry Patmore is to those who have found all that was his to give."[54]

These poet prophets shunned the world, removed to the mountaintops where they could ponder their deep thoughts. They were often together during the two years of their friendship, walking together over the grounds of the monastery at Pantasaph or on Patmore's estate at Lymington. They frequently conversed with the priests on spiritual problems that their poetry touched on. Patmore wrote to his wife: "Francis Thompson and all the Fathers spent two hours last night in my room and we had excellent talk."[55]

Their friendship meant so much to Patmore that he made an offer to Thompson, shortly before his own death, that can hardly be reconciled with his reputation for arrogance and pride. He wrote:

> You were looking so unwell when we parted, that, not having heard from you, I am somewhat alarmed. If, at any time, you find yourself seriously ill, and do not

54 L. Wheaton, "Psyche," 355.
55 Champneys, I, 133.

> find the attendance, food, etc., sufficiently good, tell me and I will go to Pantasaph to take care of you for any time you may find me useful. It would be a great pleasure and honour to serve you in any way.[56]

No wonder Thompson loved and revered Patmore, an old man, thirty-six years his senior, offering to wait on him. Thompson gently refused his generous offer, and within four months was himself "shocked and overcome" to hear of Patmore's death. His grief overflowed into words trying to express what Patmore had meant to him. "It remains a personal (and wonderful) memory that to me sometimes, athwart the shifting clouds of converse, was revealed by glimpses the direct vision of that oceanic vast of intellect."[57] Of his last book of poetry New Poems, he wrote: "This latest, highest, of my work is now born dumb. It had been sung into his sole ears. Now there is none who speaks its language."[58] His sense of loss is also recorded in verse which seems to give some evidence that Patmore's death and Thompson's determination to write no more poetry are somehow connected. In 1897, the year after Patmore's death, in his notebook we read: "End of Poet. Beginning of Journalist. The years of transition completed."[59] What part Patmore played in this transition, and the effect that his death had on Thompson, are matters of conjecture; but so great a friendship and so intimate an

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56 E. Meynell, 176.
57 Ibid., 177.
58 Ibid., 178.
59 Connolly, Criticisms , vii.

exchange of ideas are not soon forgotten, nor can their influence be easily dismissed. Perhaps, some inkling of the truth can be found in the following lines, which expose the inmost feelings of Thompson's bereaved heart:

> O how I miss you any casual day!
> And as I walk
> Turn, in the customed way,
> Towards you with the talk
> Which who but you should hear?
> And know the intercepting day
> Betwixt me and your only listening ear;
> And no man ever more my tongue shall hear,
> And dumb amid an alien folk I stray.[60]

60 E. Meynell, 178.

CHAPTER II

PATMORE'S INFLUENCE ON THOMPSON'S THOUGHT

"What I put forth as a bud, he blew on and it blossomed. The contact of our ideas was dynamic. He reverberated my idea with such and so many echoes that it returned to me greater than I gave it forth."[1]

The frankness with which Thompson exposes Patmore's influence on his ideas is equalled only by his eagerness to acknowledge his debt to Patmore. Our interest is aroused by such an open avowal of indebtedness, and curiosity prompts an investigation into its nature and extent. Thompson himself has qualified the extent of the influence in the passage just quoted; and it is well to keep in mind that Patmore's influence is one of encouragement and strengthening of Thompson's own ideas. Their thoughts complemented one another's; but Patmore, because of his greater age and experience, was able to broaden and deepen the basic conceptions of Thompson.

The whole problem of the dynamic contact of their ideas resolves itself into this one simple, but comprehensive fact; they were both more interested in the supernatural than in the natural. They saw through and beyond the world about them into its spiritual significance. Their ultimate goal was union with God, and everything served them as a means to attain it.

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1 Connolly, In His Paths, 66.

Thompson's joy was to have found one who could see with him the spiritual vistas of which facts were only the symbols. Patmore had said:

> The poet is, par excellence, the perceiver, nothing having any interest for him unless he can, as it were, see and touch it with spiritual senses with which he is preeminently endowed. The saints, indeed, seem for the most part to have had these senses greatly developed by their holiness and their habitual suppression of the corporeal senses.[2]

Thompson echoes the same idea. "In proportion to the height of their sanctity the saints are inevitable poets. Sanctity is essential song."[3]

The reverance felt by both Patmore and Thompson for their vocation as poet is often expressed in their writings. They never tire of elaborating on the idea of the true poet being a prophet and seer. Patmore says:

> The poet, again, is not more singular for the delicacy of his spiritual insight, which enables him to see celestial beauty and substantial reality, where all is blank to most others, than for the surprising range and alertness of vision, whereby he detects, in external nature, those likenesses and echoes by which spiritual realities can alone be rendered credible....Such likenesses, when chosen by the imagination, not the fancy, of the true Poet, are real words—the only real words; for "that which is unseen is known by that which is seen," and natural similitudes often contain and are truly the visible ultimates of the unseen.[4]

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2 C. Patmore, Religio Poetae, George Bell and Sons, London, 1893, 2.
3 E. Meynell, 143.
4 C. Patmore, Religio Poetae, 3.

Thompson, convinced as he was of the religious significance of poetry, was thrilled at the words of Patmore, and later wrote in an essay of his own:

> For poetry is the teacher of beauty; and without beauty men would soon lose the conception of a God and exchange God for the devil....Whence it was, doubtless, that poetry and religion were of old so united, as is seen in the prophetic books of the Bible.[5]

In keeping with their exalted ideal of a true poet as a prophet and seer, Patmore and Thompson wrote almost exclusively of spiritual significance; or rather, they made everything a signpost to heaven, leading to union with God. At first, Thompson sought this union with God through the symbols that most clearly showed it to him; innocence and childhood. The first poems he wrote were to children, the Meynell children; and they display his powers of insight and perception into the pure mind and soul of a child. Thompson was led by the sweetness and loveableness of the child closer to the Creator from Whom her sweetness flowed. Every incident furnished him a reason for making some reflection on God. The love of the child for him, made him think of the love of God:

> O child! I love, for I love and know;
> But you, who love nor know at all
> The diverse chambers in Love's guest-hall,
> Where some rise early, few sit long;
> In how differing accents hear the throng
> His great Pentecostal tongue.[6]

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5 The Works of Francis Thompson, Burns and Oates, Ltd., London, 1913, 3 vols., III, 106.

6 Ibid., I, 7.

The height of his spirit of innocence and childlike delight in the things of God is expressed in "The Making of Viola." More than a "mere verbal dance," as Mégroz calls it, it is an exercise of Faith, an exulting credo in God's loving care for us to the smallest detail.

> Cast a star therein to drown,
> Like a torch in cavern brown,
> Sink a burning star to drown
> Whelmed in eyes of Viola.
>
> Lave, Prince Jesus, a
> Star in eyes of Viola.

Perhaps the best description of his poetry at this period of his life is given to us by Thompson himself in his tenderly touching "Ex Ore Infantium."

> So, a little Child, come down
> And hear a child's tongue like Thy own;
> Take me by the hand and walk
> And listen to my baby-talk.[8]

Truly these first poems are "baby-talk" in comparison with the powerful, soul-stirring poems of his later years. The fascination that the innocence and freshness of children had for him could well have been a reaction from the filth and wickedness of the streets from which he had been so recently rescued. It was a natural reaction for his faith to seek the purity of a child; and it was also natural for his personality to turn to the child for he was always more at home with children than with adults. He shared their evaluation of things on

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7 Ibid., I, 14.
8 Ibid., I, 22.

an eternal scale; but as a result he was isolated from mankind, and his poetry reflects a melancholic note. He, himself, later in his life, realized the benefit of that separation.

> Most poets, probably, like most saints, are prepared for their mission by an initial segregation, as the seed is buried to germinate; before they can utter the oracle of poetry, they must first be divided from the body of men.

The poems about children were all written and published before Thompson met Patmore, although he was undoubtedly aware of his work. Sister Songs, another poem extolling the simplicity and innocence of children, was published after Thompson's first meeting with Patmore, but does not show any definite influence of the more mature mind of Patmore. This poem does contain, however, the famous lines of unconscious imitation of Patmore, which Thompson acknowledged in a note to the Preface:

> One image in the Proem was an unconscious plagiarism from the beautiful image of Mr. Patmore's St. Valentine's Day:
>
> 'O baby Spring
> That flutter'st sudden 'neath the breast of Earth,
> A month before the birth!'
>
> Finding I could not disengage it without injury to the passage in which it is embedded, I have preferred to leave it, with this acknowledgement to a Poet rich enough to lend to the poor. --Francis Thompson[10]

The significance of this acknowledgement is not in the incident to which it refers; but in the fact that Thompson was, at this time, aware

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9 Ibid., III, 11.
10 Ibid., I, 226.

of Patmore's poetry to such an extent that he compared his own to it and was cognizant of the similarity between certain passages whether it was deliberate or not.

Patmore's greatest influence on Thompson's thought was toopen up to him the symbolic significance of nuptial love, which was for patmore the first and foremost of the symbols which lead men to the love of God. In explaining his conviction in this matter he likens natural love to St. John the Baptist, the Precursor of Christ:

> The relation of Natural Love to Divine Love is represented by him with a consistent aptness and an amount of detail which can scarcely have been accidental.
>
> In the first place he is not represented as simply a Prophet, but as the "Precursor" of Christ, as Natural Love is the Precursor of the Divine. 'The natural first, and afterwards the spiritual.' St. Bernard says: 'The love of God has its first root in the most secret of the human affections.' The love between God and the soul is constantly declared to be, in its highest perfection, the love that subsists between Bridegroom and Bride ("thy Maker is thy Husband," etc., etc.) and our only means of understanding and attaining to these supernatural relations are the meditation and contemplation of their types in nature.[11]

Alice Meynell grasped the message that Patmore wanted to convey and reassured Thompson who was somewhat doubtful of it at first. In fact, before Thompson would trust himself to review Patmore's book, he asked the advice of Father Anselm, a priest at Pantasaph.

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11 Patmore, Religio, 10.

patmore records Father Anselm's reaction in a letter to his wife. "Father Anselm, the Superior, and a profound contemplative, said he had never read anything so fine as the 'Precursor', He and I had a long talk alone about nuptial love and he went all lengths with me in the honour of the marriage embrace."[12] With this encouragement and that of Alice Meynell, Thompson could not hold out against the violence of the expression of ideas which so appealed to him. Alice Meynell's comments on The Unknown Eros are practically as illuminating as Patmore's own utterances.

> That the general purpose of the poems is obscure is inevitable. It has the obscurity of profound clear waters. What the poet chiefly secures to us is the understanding that love and its bonds, its bestowal and reception, do but rehearse the action of the union of God with humanity--that there is no essential man save Christ, and no essential woman except the soul of mankind. When the singer of a Song of Songs seems to borrow the phrase of human love, it is rather that the human love had first borrowed the truths of the love of God.[13]

Thompson was further convinced of the validity of Patmore's symbolism by his own study into the symbolism of the Bible, which greatly interested him; and by the writings of the saints, mainly the mystics of the Church. St. Bernard in an exposition of the symbols of the Canticle of Canticles gives the theological basis

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12 Champneys, II, 133.
13 V. Meynell, 111.

for Patmore's poetry.

> The love of God and of the Soul can be
> expressed in no way so perfectly as by
> the mutual love of Bride and Bridegroom,...
> since this relationship is the ideal one
> of love, it is well that the name of Bride
> should be given to the soul that loves.[14]

This fundamental symbol is the basis of Patmore's influence on Thompson's ideas. Thompson's idea of love matured, not only in its symbolism from the innocence of children's love to the deeper love of man for woman, but also in its significance of spiritual childhood to the joy and fruition of the love of the soul for God, which the mystics call the Spiritual Marriage.

As early as Love in Dian's Lap, signs of this spiritual love can be seen.

> Chastest, since such you are,
> Take this curbed spirit of mine,
> Which your own eyes invest with light divine,
> For lofty love and high auxiliar
> In daily exalt emprise
> Which outsoars mortal eyes.[15]

Not that Thompson ever ceased to be a child. The childlike quality of his naivete and simplicity never left him. When his thoughts soared upward after Patmore's, some clung to the first idea of innocence. Alice Meynell, the greatest feminine inspiration in his life and one of the keenest critics of his work, is thus commemorated by him:

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14 O. Burdett, The Idea of Coventry Patmore, Oxford University Press, London, 1921, 9.
15 Thompson, I, 83-4.

> For this was even that Lady, and none other,
> The man in me calls 'Love,' the child calls 'Mother.'[16]

It is in New Poems that the first definite signs of Patmore's influence can be traced. This is the book that was dedicated to Patmore, whose untimely death preceded its publication by only a few months. Thompson explains the dedication in a note: "This dedication was written while the dear friend and great poet to whom it was addressed yet lived. It is left as he saw it--the last verses of mine that were ever to pass under his eye."[17] These were also the last poems Thompson was to write, with the exception of a few odes. Alone, lacking the approval and encouragement of Patmore, on which he had relied, Thompson turned to prose to say, not so much what he had to say, but to judge what others said in the light of his experience.

Thompson, himself, said that New Poems was

> ...a very stern, sober, and difficult volume. 'Tis more varied in range than my former work; and by my arrangement I have done my best to emphasize and press into service this, the solitary redeeming fact from the popular standpoint.[18]

Thompson does not say that this greater variety is the result of Patmore's influence; but Patmore is at least partially responsible. In particular, the repeated references to nuptial love and the use of marriage as a symbol of Divine Love find their source in Patmore.

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16 Ibid., I, 101.
17 E. Meynell, 178.
18 Ibid., 181.

Patmore's basic concept is that human love leads to divine. He treats of human love in an intimate yet reverential way, always under the aspect of nuptial love, while Thompson preferred to deal with its spiritual significance.

> It was of course a fundamental position in his [Patmore's] philosophy—the close analogy between love and God. In a sense the lover is an emanation from God. God speaks through his lovers....Patmore rises into lofty thought in this direction. He sees the woman he loves as a ray from God, a shaft of Divine Light. She comes down from God and linking hands with him in earthly life, takes him up towards God.[19]

Patmore's "Wedding Sermon" is a transitional piece between the earlier The Angel in the House and The Unknown Eros. It contains in many beautiful passages the substance of Patmore's theme that nuptial love is indeed the highest love on a human plane but that it is a prelude to the real love in man's life, the love of God.

> The love of marriage claims, above
> All other kinds, the name of love,
> As perfectest, though not so high
> As love which heaven with single eye
> Considers...[20]

Thompson adapts this idea of Patmore's to his own spiritual attractions, using the symbolism of the liturgy. In particular, this is seen in "Assumpta Maria," in which Thompson takes his symbolism from the Office for the feast of the Assumption. He idealizes his love in the person of the Blessed Virgin, and although he elevates her in a very spiritualized love, he uses the symbols of Spouse and nuptial love to show the intimacy

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19 Braybrooke, 14.
20 C. Patmore, Poems, G. Bell and Sons, London, 1928, 253.

and dignity of her position:

> Lo! He standeth, Spouse and Brother,
> I to Him, and He to me,
> Who impressed me where my mother
> Fell, beneath the apple tree....
> She in us and we in her are;
> Beating Godward; all that pine,
> Lo, a wonder and a terror—
> The Sun hath blushed the Sea to Wine!
> He the Anteros and Eros,
> She the Bride and Spirit; for
> Now the days of promise near us,
> And the Sea shall be no more.[21]

The idea of spiritual marriage also appears in "The After Woman," where in speaking of Mary and in her all women who came after her, Thompson places his emphasis on her nearness to God which he can express only in the terms of love. He calls her:

> Sister of the Canticle
> And thee for God grown marriageable.[22]

And:

> When to love <u>you</u> is (O Christ's Spouse!)
> To love the beauty of His house.[23]

"A Narrow Vessel" gives us the clearest idea of Thompson's version of this symbol of love, primarily because he left us his own criticism of it, explaining what he meant to convey in it.

> How many have grasped the significance of
> my sequence, "A Narrow Vessel"? Critics
> either overlooked it altogether or adverted
> to it as trivial and disconnected. One,
> who prized it, and wished I had always written
> as humanly, grieved that the epilogue turned

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21 Thompson, II, 55.
22 <u>Ibid.</u>, II, 65.
23 <u>Ibid.</u>, II, 65.

> it into an unreal allegory. He could not
> understand that all human love was to me
> a symbol of divine love; nay, that human
> love was in my eyes a piteous failure unless
> of an image of the supreme Love which gave
> meaning and reality to its seeming insanity.[24]

Patmore not only could understand this symbolism of human love, he even precedes Thompson in singing the praises of virginity as surpassing the glories of nuptial love, although he praises the "wedded Spouse, if virginal of thought." Patmore chooses his symbolism from the Apocalypse, recalling:

> The nuptial song,
> Song ever new to us and them, that saith,
> "Hail Virgin in Virginity a Spouse!"
> Heard first below
> Within the little house
> At Nazareth;
> Heard yet in many a cell where brides of Christ
> Lie hid, emparadised.[25]

Thus he compares consecrated virgins to the Blessed Virgin Mary, as the highest praise he can give. He justifies his opinion by telling us that love is the most important thing in their lives.

> Love makes the life to be
> A fount perpetual of virginity;
> For, lo, the Elect
> Of generous Love, how named soe'er, affect
> Nothing but God,
> Or mediate or direct,
> Nothing but God,
> The Husband of the Heavens.[26]

Thompson is impressed with these conceptions, bringing him,

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24 E. Meynell, 173.
25 Patmore, Poems, 333.
26 Ibid, 334.

as they do, into a more direct contact with the supernatural. He has accepted nuptial love, more or less as an allegory, and he seems to like to keep it on an allegorical level, emphasizing the underlying spiritual significance for the symbolism he uses. In his essay, Paganism Old and New, he presents it thus:

> Not in marriage, is the fulfilment of Love, though its earthly and temporal fulfilment may be therein; for how can Love, which is the desire of soul for soul, attain satisfaction in the conjunction of body with body?...Not here is the consummation of his yearnings, in that mere knocking at the gates beyond the pillars of death and the corridors of the grave, in the union of spirit to spirit within the containing Spirit of God.[27]

Thompson's poem "Ad Castitatem" reflects the same ideas as Patmore's and even echoes the words in almost the same sense when he said:

> Teach Love the way to be
> A new virginity![28]

Other ideas of Patmore, really corollaries of this main idea, are reflected in Thompson's works. Patmore's three main points of emphasis were woman, love, and God. In Thompson he found an friend who was sympathetic from the very beginning to his desire to write about God; whose idea of Love needed only to be broadened; but whose idea of woman had to be discovered and developed. In his years of studying for the priesthood Thompson was not interested in women; in medical school, he was too busy, too sick at times, and his interest was still not aroused. His first poems, particularly that passage in Sister Songs which refers to the girl who helped him during his most

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27 Thompson, III, 48.
28 Ibid., II, 61.

desperate period on the London streets, show his attitude toward women at that period of his life. He speaks of her as a child, "a spring-flower." The kiss he received from the Meynell child reminded him of the other:

> Therefore I kissed in thee
> Her, child, and innocency,
> And spring, and all things that have gone from me,
> And that shall never be.[29]

Later in the same poem he speaks of being enraptured of a "bodiless paramour" and one "Whose sex is in thy soul." His love is for a disembodied lover, he cannot envision anything as concrete and earthly as nuptial love. He tells us:

> It was my practice from the time I left college to pray for the lady whom I was destined to love--the unknown She. It is curious that even then I did not dream of praying for her whom I was destined to marry; and yet not curious; for I previsioned that with me it would be to love, not to be loved.[30]

Thompson was to find "the unknown She" through Patmore, who opened his vision to the exalted state of women in the after life and the important role they play in this life, according to the Christian concept of womanhood. Patmore wrote "Woman is the sum and complex of all nature, and is the visible glory of God."[31] He adds another crowning compliment to woman who is for him the mirror of God: "If woman is lovely, then asks Patmore: what loveliness

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29 Ibid., 37.
30 E. Meynell, 58.
31 C. Patmore, Mystical Poems of Nuptial Love, Bruce Humphries, Boston, 1938 229.

must be in her Creator. She reflects God for He has fashioned her."[32]

Thompson sees woman as reflecting the glories of God as the moon reflects the sun.

> There was never moon
> Save the white suffering woman.[33]

In his prose he comments: "The heart of woman is the citadel, the ultimus refugium of true religiosity."[34]

And in "Orient Ode":

> By her, the Woman, does Earth live, O Lord,
> Yet she for Earth and both in Thee.[35]

Thompson expresses the exalted state of woman in this passage:

> The woman I behold, whose vision seek
> All eyes and know not; t'ward whom climb
> The steps o' the world, and beats all wing of rhyme.[36]

The ideal woman for Patmore, as well as for Thompson, was the Blessed Virgin, whom he regards as a type of God's love for man. "Every pure soul is pure woman to God....Hence the ready honor and love of all mankind for the Blessed Virgin who alone represents the true attitude of the human soul."[37] The Child's Purchase is Patmore's hymn of praise to the Blessed Mother. Mary was for him the consummation and perfection of his ideals of virginity and nuptial love and union

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32 Braybrooke, 15.
33 Thompson, II, 4.
34 E. Meynell, 170.
35 Thompson, II, 25.
36 Ibid., 43.
37 Patmore, Mystical Poems, 299.

with God.

> My Lady, yea, the Lady of my Lord,
> Who didst the first descry
> The burning secret of virginity....
> And, now, Queen-Wife,
> Sitt'st at the right hand of the Lord of Life,
> Who, of all bounty, craves for only fee
> The glory of hearing it besought with smiles by Thee![38]

Thompson refers to her in "The After Woman," of which poem Father Connolly says: "Thompson contrasts the pagan and Christian ideals of womanhood, showing that the loveliest traits of Christian womanhood are but a reflection of Mary."[39] In "Assumpta Maria" Thompson puts into poetry this same thought, that all women are contained in Mary:

> Multitudinous ascend I,
> Dreadful as a battle arrayed;
> For I bear you whither tend I;
> Ye are I: be undismayed.[40]

Another natural corollary of this great symbolism of nuptial love led Patmore and through him Thompson to respect and reverence for the human body. Father Connolly says:

> To Patmore the body was literally the temple of the Holy Ghost, and it was more. It was such a body as had been made the special dwelling-place of God, when the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became Man. Hence, for Patmore, the body derived its ultimate significance from the Incarnation in which a human body gave form, as it were to God Himself and was thus sanctified beyond the powers of comprehension.[41]

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38 Patmore, Poems, 358.
39 T. L. Connolly, S.J., Poems of Francis Thompson, D. Appleton-Century, New York, 1941, 487.
40 Thompson, II, 52.
41 Patmore, Mystical Poems, 237.

Thompson, likewise, found in the human body a source of praise to God. Patmore had discovered that in the Bible and in the liturgy of the Church are numerous references to the holiness of the body; in particular, the image of the body as the "House of God" as found in the Psalmist: "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of thy house; and the place where thy glory dwelleth."[42] Patmore thought that when he became a Catholic he would have to renounce many of his ideas as contained in his poetry; but, on the contrary, he found that the Catholic Church "alone of all Churches teaches the Incarnation as a present reality, attaches the first importance to the preservation of the body, as actually the 'House of God'."[43]

Thompson used the same symbolism in his "Domus Tua":

> A perfect woman -- Thine be laud!
> Her body is a Temple of God.
> At Doom-bar dare I make avows:
> I have loved the beauty of Thy house.[44]

Patmore uses the figure again in his ode "To the Body":

> Little, sequester'd pleasure-house.
> For God and for His Spouse![45]

To carry this symbol of nuptial love to its logical consummation, Patmore realized it required perfect surrender of the soul to the Divine Lover. This surrender, or complete submission, is a sacrifice

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42 Connolly, Poems of Thompson, 348.
43 Ibid., 348.
44 Thompson, I, 100.
45 Patmore, Poems, 327.

and often involves pain; but the soul's gaze is fixed on the higher good that will result, and consequently, it submits generously and joyfully. It is only by using God's creatures according to the laws which God has laid down that man is able to enjoy them to the fullest. Patmore's insistence on the superiority of law over license, is reflected in Thompson.

In his doctrine of nuptial love Patmore exhorts control of natural sense and desire, and submission to God's control, so that man may know true happiness and joy.

In the "Wedding Sermon" Patmore writes:

> Love's inmost nuptial sweetness see
> In the doctrine of virginity!
> Could lovers, at their dear wish, blend,
> 'Twould kill the bliss which they intend;
> For joy is love's obedience
> Against the law of natural sense.[46]

Thompson makes this the theme of the "Epilogue" of The Narrow Vessel.

> Out of Love's arms to make fond chain,
> And, because struggle bringeth pain,
> Hate Love for Love's sweet constraint,
> Is the way of Souls that faint.
>
> Such a soul for saddest end,
> Finds Love the foe in Love the friend;
> And--oh, grief incredible!--
> Treads the way of heaven to hell.[47]

Thompson again expresses the same idea in his poem "Any Saint." He reveals through a series of paradoxes that man's natural instincts

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46 Ibid., 254.
47 Thompson, II, 89.

and desires are not always those which lead to his union with God.

> Compost of Heaven and mire,
> Slow foot and swift desire!
> Lo,
> To have Yes, choose No;
>
> Gird, and thou shalt unbind;
> Seek not, and thou shalt find;
> To eat,
> Deny thy meat;
>
> And thou shalt be fulfilled
> With all sweet things unwilled;
> So best
> God loves to jest.[48]

In "From the Night of Forebeing" Thompson again praises the man who is able to take a little pain because his vision is focused on a greater good that will eventually result.

> Firm is the man...
> .....
> ...who looks past
> To slow much sweet from little instant sour,
> And in the first does always see the last.[49]

The only satisfactory basis for such an exalted, self-sacrificing attitude of life, is, of course, God. Other motives soon pale and weaken, even nuptial love is not powerful enough unless it is based on God. Patmore wrote:

> God is the only reality, and we are real only so far as we are in his order and He is in us....All evils are phantoms, even physical pain, which a perfectly courageous heart converts by simply confronting it, into present and sensible joy of purgation and victory.[50]

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48 Ibid., 49-50.
49 Ibid., II, 44.
50 Patmore, Mystical Poems, 281.

Patmore speaks of a courageous heart and yet he knows that human nature shrinks from pain, even while feeling shame at shrinking. In his poem addressed to "Pain," he expresses this beautifully:

> How shameful, too
> Is this;
> That, when thou lov'st, I am at first afraid
> Of thy fierce kiss,
> Like a young maid;
> And only trust thy charms
> And get my courage in thy throbbing arms.[51]

Thompson uses the identical image and sings of the same sentiment in "By Reason of Thy Law."

> That he who kens to meet Pain's kisses fierce
> Which kiss against his tears,
> Dread, loss, not love frustrate
> Nor all iniquity of the froward years
> Shall his inured wing make idly bate.[52]

This idea of pain seemed to fascinate the two poets; and they personified Pain as the Goddess and Angel of their lives. Patmore addresses her as:

> Angel, whom even they that will pursue
> Pleasure with hell's whole gust
> Find that they must
> Perversely woo.[53]

Thompson caught the same idea of the inevitability of pain and addresses her:

> I witness call the austere goddess, Pain
> Whose mirrored image trembles where it lies
> In my confronting eyes.[54]

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51 Patmore, Poems, 352.
52 Thompson, II, 15.
53 Patmore, Poems, 351.
54 Thompson, II, 121.

Pain is something that resulted from Original Sin and as such cannot be avoided by any human being. Patmore calls pain the "medicine of sin" and further shows that as such it brings joy to man because by its action man is again made pleasing to God.

> And my roused spirit is
> Another fire of bliss,
> Wherein I learn
> Feelingly how the pangful, purging fire
> Shall furiously burn
> With joy, not only of assured desire,
> But also present joy
> Of seeing the life's corruption, stain by stain,
> Vanish in the clear heat of Love irate...
> Leaving the man, so dark erewhile,
> The mirror merely of God's smile.[55]

Thompson follows this same trend of thought, through to the same conclusion in his prose:

> Pain, which came to man as a penalty, remains with him as a consecration; his ignominy, by a divine ingenuity, he is enabled to make his exaltation....Pain is. Pain is inevadible. Pain may be made the instrument of joy. It is the angel with the fiery sword guarding the gates of the lost Eden. The flaming sword which pricked man from Paradise must wave him back.[56]

Thus instead of being avoided, pain should be desired as:

> O great key-bearer and Keeper
> Of the treasures of God![57]

Thompson desired it; he was on intimate terms with his Lady Pain.

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55 Patmore, Poems, 351.
56 E. Meynell, 230.
57 Thompson, II, 123.

> Of thy beauty undesired am I desirous,
> for knowledge is with thee, and dominion,
> and piercing, and healing; thou woundest with
> a thorn of light; thou settest portress by
> the gates of hearts; and a sceptred quiet
> rests regal in thine eyes' sepulchral
> solitudes, in the tenebrous desolations
> of thine eyes.[58]

Thompson uses another image found in Patmore's "Legem Tuam Dilexi." It is probable that Patmore's symbol of the leaf and flower restraining the rebellious power of nature, initiated a similar train of thought in Thompson.

Patmore wrote:

> The furious power
> To soft growth twice constrained in leaf and flower,
> Protests, and longs to flash its faint self far
> Beyond the dimmest star.[59]

Thompson's version retains the image of the leaf and flower in a modified form that may be wholly original in conception, but the similarity is striking.

> Unshakable from the bright Phoebean awe,
> In leaf, flower, mold, and tree
> Resolved into individual liberty.[60]

Man also rebels against law, thinking to find his happiness in license and independence. But God did not create man as an independent, self-sufficient being; he is dependent upon nature for his sustenance; he is dependent upon his fellow human beings in a thousand ways, social as well as economic; but most of all,

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58 Thompson, III, 114.
59 Patmore, Poems, 324.
60 Thompson, II, 36.

man is dependent upon the Divine Providence of God, Who created him. This dependence does not mean that man cannot enjoy true freedom in the exercise of his free will. Universal obedience to the laws of God makes everyone free to enjoy the good things God created without the suspicion, fear, or distrust that is aroused by unbridled license. Patmore words it thus:

> And the just man does on himself affirm,
> God's limits, and is conscious of delight,
> Freedom and right.[61]

Thompson voices the thought in several passages from his poetry. In his ode "To the English Martyrs," he says:

> Hardest servitude has he
> That's jailed in arrogant liberty;
> And freedom, spacious and unflawed,
> Who is walled about with God.[62]

In "From the Night of Forebeing" the same idea of freedom through submission is found.

> And sweetly to the great compulsion draw
> Of God's alone true-manumitting law,
> And Freedom, only which the wise intend,
> To work thine innate end.[63]

In several passages Thompson makes use of the same image that Patmore has used. This, of course, does not necessarily indicate that they were written in imitation of Patmore, but at least it shows a decided similarity of thought. Patmore uses snow as a figure of

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61 Patmore, Poems, 325.
62 Thompson, II, 136.
63 Ibid., II, 36.

virginity in this passage:

> There's light
> The day still lingering in the lap of snow.[64]

Thompson uses the same figure in his poem to Alice Meynell, "To a Poet Breaking Silence."

> And Sappho lay her burning brows
> In white Cecilia's lap of snows.[65]

One of the most beautiful thoughts in Patmore's poems is expressed in his poignant poem, "Tired Memory," as spoken by his first wife on her death-bed:

> Thou canst not be
> Faithful to God and faithless unto me![66]

Thompson's echo of this is found in "A Holocaust":

> For still 'tis true;--because I am so true,
> My Fair, to Heaven, I am so true to you![67]

These two poets are not completely out of touch with the times in which they live. They heartily disagreed with many of the contemporary ideas and customs. One such prevailing idea was the adulation of Science. Patmore said:

> Science without the idea of God, as the beginning and end of knowledge, is as the empty and withered slough of the snake, and the man, however 'wise and learned' and 'well conducted' who has freed himself in thought from the happy bondage of that idea, is among the most sordid of slaves...[68]

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64 Patmore, Poems, 333.
65 Thompson, I, 80.
66 Patmore, Poems, 290.
67 Thompson, II, 95.
68 Patmore, Mystical Poems, 307.

In his poem, "L'Allegro" he speaks of Science:

> Science, beyond all other lust
> Endowed with appetite for dust,
> We glance at where it grunts, well-sty'd,
> And pass upon the other side.[69]

Thompson in "An Anthem of Earth" expresses his opinion of science:

> Science, old noser in its prideful straw,
> That with anatomising scalpel tents
> Its three-inch of thy skin, and brags 'All's bare'--[70]

In his poem, "Orient Ode," Thompson uses the symbol of science: "A bright sciential idolatry." [71] In the original manuscript Thompson made this note on the line:

> For once I have used a symbol which--unlike
> true symbolism--will not turn every way.
> The parallel is incomplete, for the moon
> is dead--'the corpse in Night's highway'
> as Mr. Patmore says. Otherwise the parallel
> is accurate, your science may grasp at it.
> Yet even science has lately discovered (which
> poets never needed scientist to tell them)
> that the moon does not simply reflect the sun's
> rays, but absorbs and emits them again. When
> science has drawn the corollary that they must
> needs be charged with the moon's own emanations,
> she will be on the way towards knowing a little
> of the heavens as the poet knows them.[72]

The poets do not disapprove of real science, but only of false science. At best, Patmore could only see science from the point of view of poet, although as a young boy he had been very interested in it. He says: "The greatest and perhaps the only real use of

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69 Patmore, Poems, 370.
70 Thompson, II, 113.
71 Ibid, II, 25.
72 Connolly, Poems of Francis Thompson, 457-8.

natural science is to supply similies and parables for poets and theologians."[73]

It is perhaps in their symbolism and in their deep interest in the meaning of symbols that Patmore's influence is most evident in Thompson's work. Patmore said: "Symbols and parables and metaphors--which are parables on a small scale--are the only means of adequately conveying, or rather hinting, super-sensual knowledge."[74]

We are fortunate in having a portion of the correspondence between Patmore and Thompson on the subject of symbolism. Thompson discovered upon the publication of Religio Poetae that Patmore was "deeply perceptive of the Scriptures' symbolic meanings, scouted by moderns; and his instant intuitional use of the symbolic imagery gives his own work the quality of substantial poetry."[75] Thompson had already turned to the Scriptures for his symbolism and was delighted to find that the older poet had likewise found in the inspired images material for his poetic genius.

Thompson again forestalls any rash judging of his works as depending completely on Patmore for ideas and imagery. He was the first to recognize the similarities of their poetry and he hastened to enlighten Patmore by sending him a copy of "An Orient Ode":

> ...not for its literary merit, but because,
> without such a disclaimer, I fear you

73 C. Patmore, Principle in Art, G. Bell and Sons, London, 1889, 74.
74 Ibid., 22.
75 E. Meynell, 143.

> would think I had been the first to find your book 'd----d good to steal from.' As a matter of fact, it was written soon after Easter, and was suggested by passages in the liturgies of Holy Saturday.[76]

He goes on in the same letter to Patmore to elucidate once more the extent and the value of Patmore's influence, as being encouragement to Thompson to yield to his deep mystical leanings and write the poetry to which they impelled him:

> ...with superfluous caution--I intended much of it to be sealed; but your book has mainly broken the seals I had put on it. There is quite enough in it of yours, without the additional presumption that I had hastened to make immediate use of your last book. As far as others are concerned, it must rest under that imputation to which the frequent coincidence in the selection of symbolism--as an example, the basing of the whole passage on the symbolic meaning of the West--very naturally leads. To yourself such coincidence is explicable, it will not be to 'outsiders.'[77]

This letter initiated a correspondence on the subject of symbolism that is immensely enlightening in reading Thompson's poems. Patmore evidently criticized Thompson's use of the symbolism of the West, for he wrote to Patmore:

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76 Ibid., 143.
77 Ibid., 144.

> With regard to the other poem, I want to allude particularly to your invaluable correction of my misuse of the Western symbolism. On re-examination, the whole passage discloses a confusion of thought naturally causing a confusing of symbolism.[78]

Patmore continues the subject in the next letter, eager to share the treasure he had unearthed in the symbolism of the Bible.

> I wish I could see and talk to you on the subject of the symbolism you speak of. The Bible and all the theologies are full of it, but it is too deep and significant to get itself uttered in writing. The Psalms especially are full of it...'Water,' for example, is constantly used for the sensible nature in its extreme purity, as in the Blessed Virgin.[79]

Thompson had used this very symbol in his "Orient Ode" when speaking of the Blessed Virgin:

> The moon, O leave, pale ruined Eve;
> Behold her fair and greater daughter
> Offers to thee her fruitful water.[80]

In "Assumpta Maria" Thompson again uses the symbol of water for Mary:

> I am the four River's Fountain,
> Watering Paradise of old;
> Cloud down-raining the Just One am, [81]

Again the symbol appears in Thompson's Ad Castitatem, his highest praise of purity.

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78 Ibid., 144.
79 Ibid., 145.
80 Thompson, II, 21.
81 Ibid., 53.

> Through thee, Virginity, endure
> The stars, most integral and pure,
> And ever contemplete
> Themselves inviolate
> In waters...[82]

Patmore concluded his letter to Thompson:

> I hope, some day, to see and have speech with you on this and other matters. Meantime I will only hint that the North represents the simple Divine virility, the South the Divine womanhood, the East their synthesis in the Holy Spirit, and the West the pure natural womanhood 'full of grace.' I could give you no end of proofs, but it would take me months to collect them, from all I have read and forgotten.[83]

Thompson's reply indicates in the beginning that he is not satisfied with Patmore's answer to his question regarding the symbolic question. However, as the letter progresses, Thompson reiterates his indebtedness to Patmore for reassurance and interpretation in his symbolism.

> You rather overlook the purport of my inquiry in regard to the symbolic question. I wanted to know if there had been any actual progressive development among the nations with regard to the quarters in which they worshipped--as an historic fact, apart from symbolic meaning. But this is such a minor matter, and the concluding hint of your letter contains so much of value to me, that I am not sorry you misapprehended me. Of course

82 Ibid., II, 60.
83 E. Meynell, 145.

> I am quite aware that it is impossible to answer openly--indeed impossible to ask openly--deeper matters in a letter. But that is not requisite in my case. It is enough that my gaze should be set in the necessary direction; the rest may be safely left to the practised fixity of my looking. Indicative longings such as you employed in your letter, you may safely trust me to understand. With regard to what you say about the symbolism of the North, I had substantially discerned it for myself. Indeed it formed part of a little essay already written. It will be none the worse for the corroboration of your remarks; there is always something in your way of stating even what is already to me a res visa, which adds sight to my seeing.[84]

Mégroz in attempting to minimize Patmore's influence on Thompson says:

> It seems that Thompson owes much more to his other acknowledged source, the liturgies, than to Patmore's poetry.

But even he is forced to add:

> ...though, as we shall see, he owed a debt to Patmore's mind.[85]

While Thompson may have used the specific images and symbols from the liturgies, he did so in the light of Patmore's interpretation of these symbols. Patmore was always ready to encourage and explain whenever Thompson felt the need of his judgment.

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84 Ibid., 146.
85 Mégroz, 97.

We see Thompson's appreciation of Patmore's use of symbols in an article, "Patmore's Philosophy," written in 1900. Thompson says:

> The whole of his teaching, both in prose and in poetry, was based on the principle that 'the things which are unseen are known by the things which are seen,' or, in his favorite quotation of Goethe, 'God reveals himself in ultimates.' The universe, no less than man, is made after the image of God. But, since things equal to the same thing are equal to one another, it follows that Nature is throughout analogous with man, as both are with God. On this, the system of the Neo-Platonists, Mr. Patmore proceeds, in verse and prose, perpetually discerning in Nature the revelation of man, in man of Nature, of God in both. For his first principle he relies on intuition, which, like all true poets and Platonists, he holds to be a higher reason.[86]

Thompson, in order to give such a lucid exposition of Patmore's principles, must himself have thoroughly comprehended them and, above all, been sympathetically inclined towards them. He remarks in his review that all could not understand the beauty contained in the pages of Patmore's book. But Thompson understood and could say that for him Patmore was "full of profound suggestion."[87] That Thompson did go to him both in perplexity and in the enthusiasm of his discoveries is proof enough of his confidence in the more mature mind of his friend.

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86 Thompson, Criticisms, 212.
87 Ibid., 211.

We turn to Thompson for the final word of acknowledgement, for he better than any other can express the exact nature of the influence he sustained. In a letter he wrote to Patmore, he said:

> You are the only man with whom I can talk at all. With all others it is a matter of playing an intermittent chord or so, as an accompaniment to their talk....Yours is the conversation of a man who has trodden before me the way which for years I trod alone, and often desperate, seeing no guiding parallel among modern poets to my aims and experience.[88]

88 Hind, 246.

CHAPTER III

PATMORE'S INFLUENCE ON THOMPSON'S POETIC TECHNIQUE

"I feel a personal and sort of proprietary interest in the metrical qualities of much of Mr. Thompson's verse."[1]

This quotation from Patmore's review of Thompson's Poems, which had been published in 1893, gives us Patmore's reaction to the meter of Thompson's poetry before the two poets had met and formed an intimate friendship which led them to look for similarities in their works. Patmore had always been acutely aware of meter and the technicalities of poetry, for he felt that "in art, the style in which a thing is said is of more importance than the thing said or done."[2] Patmore had personal, and to him bitter, experience of the truth of this in the criticism of The Angel in the House. He had chosen to write this poem in rhymed octosyllabic quatrain because he felt that it was "a gay and jocund measure, eminently adapted to a story of successful love and happy marriage."[3] He was aware that this simple meter might be ridiculed, but he was never one to abandon his ideas through human respect. Nonetheless, in his later years, in spite of its tremendous popular appeal, he could not help complaining of the lack of appreciation accorded his first work by

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1 C. Patmore, "Mr. Francis Thompson, A New Poet," Fortnightly Review, January, 1894, 21.
2 Symons, 355.
3 Champneys, I, 161.

serious critics.

> The Athenaeum (Dec. 1890) still looks upon the poetry of The Angel in the House and The Victories of Love as 'garrulous' and 'prattling.' That comes of my 'vehicle,' a modest and unpretentious metre. Were Bismarck to take Mr. --- or Mr. --- for a drive in a tax-cart, they would never guess, if they were not told, that the Prince was anything better than a grocer. Though I travel the same ground and at the same level, I have immensely gained in reputation with these ninnies by mounting a 'mail-phaeton.' I have even had some thoughts of rewriting The Angel for them, in the metre of The Unknown Eros.[4]

Thus Patmore himself gives perhaps the best testimony to the significance of his statement concerning the importance of style. His interest in discovering a perfect meter led to his experimenting with various meters early in his career. In his review of Thompson's poems he wrote:

> Between the years 1867 and 1877 I was mainly engaged in endeavouring to draw attention to the capacities of the iambic tetrameter with unlimited catalexis, which is commonly called the 'irregular' ode, though it is really as 'regular' as any other English metre, and even much more so, if its subtle laws are truly considered and obeyed.[5]

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4 Ibid., I, 161.
5 Patmore, "Francis Thompson," 21.

Patmore's interest in the ode form was first aroused by reading Wordsworth's great ode, "On Intimations of Immortality." He felt that it was the ideal form for the poetry he wanted to write, but he found that it had not been used successfully in English poetry. "Good examples of the irregular ode are so scarce, —Wordsworth's being the only generally satisfactory one in the language, that we cannot venture to pronounce with any confidence upon the law of this measure."[6]

The origin of the English odes goes beyond Wordsworth, through Milton and Spenser in English, to the Italian canzoni. Patmore's odes, in one review or another, have been compared by critics to each of the poets mentioned above and even to Dante, from whom the form inherited some of its characteristics.

Patmore, as we have already seen, chose as meter for his first poems the rhymed eight-syllable quatrain. The opening lines of The Angel in the House give us an idea of his use of this meter, as well as an expression of the purpose of the poem.

> Lo, Love's obey'd by all. 'Tis right
> That all should know what they obey,
> Lest erring conscience damp delight,
> And folly laugh our joys away.
> Thou Primal Love, who grantest wings
> And voices to the woodland birds,
> Grant me the power of saying things
> Too simple and too sweet for words.[7]

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6 F. Page, Patmore: A Study in Poetry, Oxford University Press, London, 1933, 148-9.

7 Patmore, Poems, 6.

In 1860, he changed from the quatrain to couplets but retained the iambic meter and eight-syllable line. From "The Wedding Sermon" these lines are representative:

> In Godhead rise, thither flow back
> All loves, which, as they keep or lack,
> In their return, the course assigned,
> Are virtue or sin. Love's every kind,
> Lofty or low, of spirit or sense,
> Desire is, or benevolence.[8]

The new meter which resulted from Patmore's experimentation was first used in the Odes of 1868, which Patmore had printed privately and which were later incorporated into The Unknown Eros. Patmore was jubilant about his discovery: "I have hit upon the finest metre that ever was invented."[9] Patmore did not mean that he invented the meter, but that he had "hit upon" its proper use. He had recognized this use in Wordsworth and Milton, but in general he felt that the poets who used it "covered it with ridicule." His particular discovery in the form and the principle upon which he places the most emphasis is the free use of the pause, or, as he calls it, the "catalexis." His criticism of the earlier users of the form is based on their misuse of the pause.

> Even when their 'motif' has been
> suitable and their language has
> possessed something of the purity
> and sweet austerity which this form
> of verse requires, the full meaning

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8 Patmore, Poems, 252.
9 Champneys, I, 252.

> of its great range of pause--from that of the long-drawn sigh of two syllables to the passionate cataract of sixteen, in which pause altogether disappears--has not been understood by them, and in their 'irregular' odes, the pause has been almost always more or less accidental and motiveless, and has given its sentiment to the poetry instead of being the outcome of the sentiment.[10]

It is in the use of the pauses, in the recognition of the value of time in poetry, that Patmore's contribution to a new meter lies. He is instrumental in directing verse-music to the ear and veering off from addressing the appeal of poetry to the eye. The inevitable outcome of this if rhyme is not maintained is free verse, which Patmore, however, did not write. He still used the iambic meter, but with a new freedom that is reflected in his subject-matter. Arthur Symons says of it: "Never was a development in metre so spiritually significant."[11] John Freeman, also, noted the suitability of the meter to Patmore's inspiration. "The irregular ode is a perfect medium for Patmore's oracular mood. It was not his invention, but he used it uniquely, and it is the best example of his theory of verse as a sequence of inflexions of the normal.[12]

To understand Patmore's emphasis on the pause, it is necessary to know how he used iambic verse, which is the principal meter that he used. Patmore, instead of counting it as a foot of two syllables,

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10 Patmore, "Francis Thompson," 21.
11 Symons, 371.
12 J. Freeman, "Coventry Patmore," Quarterly Review, July, 1923, 132.

considered it as a "dipode," with a major and a minor accent. The ten-syllable line then may become not a pentameter, but a trimeter with a pause equal to two feet filling out the measure. Thus, it is readily seen that:

> Patmore believed that all English verse depended largely upon the pause, which was a positive and not a negative condition of its beauty; and he urged that no line could be measured metrically unless the pauses were noted no less carefully than the beats, and considered in relation to the unaccented syllables.[13]

This meter has a musical quality which results primarily from an emphasis on rhythm and time. Patmore's use of time is unique in that he beats out a certain time to fill out the pauses in his meter. Of time Patmore said:

> Each line, however many syllables it may contain, ought to occupy the same time in reading, according to the analogy of bars in music. This view is supported by the best parts of the odes of Wordsworth and Milton, which may and ought to be read, each line to the same time; and also by the necessity which has invariably been felt, for printing the lines in such a manner, that the reader shall know, beforehand, the requisite period to be occupied in the delivery of the line, and in the pause by which it is to be preceded and concluded.[14]

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13 O. Burdett, The Idea of Coventry Patmore, Oxford University Press, London, 1921, 117-8.
14 Page, 148-9.

Thus his verse can be described as moving "in long undulating strains." Patmore is carried along by his theme and his words pour forth in unceasing rhythmic beauty.

> The clouds of summer kiss in flame and rain,
> And are not found again;
> But the heavens themselves eternal are with fire
> Of unapproached desire;
> By the aching heart of Love, which cannot rest,
> In blissfullest pathos so indeed possess'd.[15]

Patmore gets this effect by his careful timing, and the sensitivity of the response of the time to the subject.

> In its highest order, the lyric or 'ode,'
> he says, is a tetrameter, the line having
> the time of eight iambics. When it descends
> to narrative or the expression of a less
> exalted strain of thought, it becomes a
> dimeter, with the time of four.[16]

His critics are aware of the beauty and variety of this meter which Patmore himself called "that splendid and delicate torrent of music." One of the first reviews of The Unknown Eros said: "Every syllable has been duly poised, and there is a sweet retarding movement in the lines which invites the reader to set down in his consciousness the weight of syllables to the least and lightest."[17]

One of the best odes for showing Patmore's technique and, in particular, its musical qualities and the use of the catalexis is "To the Body." The opening lines are:

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15 Patmore, Poems, 331.
16 M. F. Egan, Studies in Literature, B. Herder, St. Louis, Mo., 1899, 102.
17 Page, 159.

> Creation's and Creator's crowning good;
> Wall of infinitude;
> Foundation of the sky,
> In heaven forecast
> And long'd for from eternity,
> Though laid the last.[18]

The effect is so overpowering that M. F. Egan can only describe these lines by saying of the first line: "It is like the full tide of the first movement of a symphony; it gives the time and scope of the piece." He goes on to describe the lines that follow: "This is dignified; this is solemn; it is pitched in the highest plane of aspiration; it will bear any analysis based on Mr. Patmore's theory of catalexis."[19]

The musical quality of Patmore's poetry is determined by the emotion which the subject arouses. It is extremely elastic and capable of any number of subtle modulations. The poet must have something to say; and if he is impelled by an inner impulse to say it, the words will be shaped by the intensity of the emotion. Patmore has much to say on this subject:

> This metre affords incomparable facilities
> for the expression of a strong feeling,
> but it is not only difficult, but impossible
> to write worthily in it without such feeling.
> The metre must be called the creation of
> passionate inspiration.[20]

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18 Patmore, Poems, 327.
19 Egan, 104.
20 Patmore, "Francis Thompson," 21.

In referring again to the lack of success that earlier poets met with in using this meter, Patmore finds that they do not have this passionate inspiration that creates the lofty music of the odes.

> Another cause of failure has been the lack of the strong though severe initiative of passion the wind of which is sufficient to raise in this metre the appropriate bellows of harmony, each growing out of the other with manifest inevitableness, from the beginning to the end.[21]

This new meter was more obedient to Patmore's poetic impulse than his former because he was not restricted by length of line or rhyme scheme but could pour forth his song with abandon in this meter of extraordinary freedom. This does not mean that Patmore was an advocate of a lawless "free verse." He accepted the conventional characteristics of poetry, rhyme and the caesura, but he used them spontaneously, making feeling and accent the rules for their use. He realized the dangers of such freedom and warned that it is to be used only by those who have first trained themselves to follow the more formal rules of poetry.

> Owing, again, to the peculiarly and essentially fluent character of this metre, it can hardly be used with full success by any poet who has not acquired, by long practice in simpler rhythms, that sense of metre which is rare even in very good poets, and that technical per-

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21 Ibid., 21.

> fection of language by which alone he can avoid those defects, extravagances, or shortcomings of expression, every one of which is a disastrous check to the all-important and self-explanatory flow of the great and delicate rhythm.[22]

Patmore disciplined himself by writing in one of the simplest meters. Burdett thinks that he did so because at first his ear was faulty and he hoped that by achieving mastery over a simple verse-form he might be able to go on to more exalted forms, or to invent his own. When he did use a new meter he was able to master it and produce pure verse music. Alice Meynell always appreciated efforts to keep within the bonds of law. She said of Patmore's work:

> When he wrote the "Odes," and used thus a free metre because he knew himself to be set at liberty by his very knowledge and love of law, that heart beat in the sensitive line, and he caught rapturous breath, or sighed as a spirit blowing whither it will.[23]

Patmore likewise shows originality in his use of rhyme. He does not abandon rhyme, but he regards it as a sort of accessory which depends upon the intensity of emotion for its use. M. F. Egan says:

> Patmore does not disregard rhyme in his 'Odes,' but it becomes an echo; he uses it as the servant of his thought; ...He begins the work by 'rhyming at indefinite intervals.' 'A license,' he says, somewhat frightened by this radical change from his earlier habit,

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22 Patmore, Courage in Politics, 162.
23 A. Meynell, 840.

> 'which is counterbalanced, in the writings of all poets who have employed this metre (catalectic verse) successfully by unusual frequency in the recurrence of the same rhyme.'[24]

He was not satisfied with the arrangement he had worked out and he said that if he wrote odes for his proposed poem on the "Marriage of the Blessed Virgin," he would use rhymes more scientifically. Almost forty years earlier he had written:

> We have spoken of rhyme as an element of genuine metre in producing at certain fixed places, and emphasis of sound which demands a corresponding weight of meaning. It has been excellently said that rhyme owes much of its charm to the fact of its containing a continual appeal to memory and expectation; and upon this saying we would found the rule that rhymes which recur at regular and unexpected intervals ought always to be increased in number, in order to make up for the effect of their irregularity in weakening the force of that appeal. Great metrists have always felt and acted upon this principle.[25]

This new meter that Patmore discovered and used had a profound effect on Thompson's poetry. He recognized that it was an innovation: "So far as your language is concerned, you have invented a new literary form..."[26] He was the first to recognize and acknowledge the echo in his own poetry of the meter of Patmore. In a letter to Patmore,

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24 Egan, 100.
25 Page, 166.
26 Connolly, In His Paths, 66.

he wrote concerning his own poem, "Orient Ode":

> The poem, even if I am to take your high and valued praises quite literally, has a defect of which you must be conscious, though you have courteously refrained from noticing it. It echoes your own manner largely, in the metre, and even in some of the diction--the latter thing of which, I think, I have seldom before rendered myself guilty.[27]

Several characteristics of this new meter would appeal to Thompson. He, like Patmore, was an excellent craftsman at the art of poetry, using various meters to the best advantage. His strong sense of rhythm could appreciate Patmore's emphasis on time and rhythm. Above all, his belief in the necessity of a poet writing only under the pressure of compelling inspiration could appreciate the freedom of scope and the poetical heights this new meter opened to him.

As usual he is anxious to acknowledge his indebtedness to Patmore, although he emphatically denies any suggested imitation where none exists,. With regard to "The Hound of Heaven" he invites a comparison with his earlier work to show the extent of Patmore's influence on the meter he used.

> 'The Ode to the Setting Sun' was published as long ago as 1889. The poem has some interest to me in view of the frequent statement that I modelled the metre of

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27 E. Meynell, 144.

> 'The Hound of Heaven' on the ode metre of Mr. Patmore. 'The Ode to the Setting Sun' was published before I had seen any of Mr. Patmore's work; and a comparison of the two poems will therefore show exactly the extent to which the later poem was affected by that great poet's practice. The ode metre of New Poems is, with this exception, completely based on the principles which Mr. Patmore may virtually be said to have discovered.

Thompson is so frank in admitting his indebtedness to Patmore that when he denies that his influence was responsible for the meter of certain poems we must here also take him at his word. A comparison of the two poems shows that, while the meter of the two is very similar, "The Hound of Heaven" is motivated by a much more powerful emotion and as a result the rhythm is more suggestive of intense emotion. The pause is used more freely and there is a greater variety in the length of the lines than there is in "The Ode to the Setting Sun." For instance these lines:

> Ah! must—
> Designer infinite!—
> Ah! must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it?[29]

This is, no doubt, the result of Thompson's emotion, which made its own meter, flowing on in passionate outburst. Patmore said of this poem:

> 'The Hound of Heaven' has so great and passionate and such a metre-creating motive, that we are carried over all obstructions of the rhythmical current,

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28 Ibid., 131-2.
29 Thompson, I, 111.

> and are compelled to pronounce it, at the
> end, one of the few 'great' odes of which
> the language can boast.[30]

It is a stirring poem, in meter and rhythm, no less than in motive. Truly and spontaneously, the meter fluctuates with the emotion; now rushing on with frenzied haste; now pausing, breathless in awe-stricken silence.

Thompson's claim for the originality of this meter must be respected not only on his word but also on the undoubtedly vital nature of the meter to the work itself. He admitted that the ode meter of New Poems was based on the principles of Patmore and many examples can be cited.

He uses the pause effectively in several of the poems; and he uses it as Patmore intended, when the emotion of the line demands that we pause. "By Reason of Thy Law" begins with an excellent example of catalectic meter:

> Here I make oath—
> Although the heart that knows its bitterness
> Hear loath,
> And credit less—[31]

This poem also contains lines which demonstrate Patmore's idea of making the length of the line depend on the sense and emotional content.

> Where on the unseen verges yet, O yet,
> At intervals,
> Trembles and falls,
> Faint lightening of remembered transient sweet—
> Ah, for too sweet
> But to be sweet a little, a little sweet, and fleet.[32]

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30 Patmore, "Francis Thompson," 22.
31 Thompson, II, 15.
32 Ibid., II, 16.

"The Dread of Height" is another of Thompson's poems which follows Patmore's principles especially closely. Needless to say the fragments quoted here do not give the same effect as reading the entire poem and comparing it with the general effedt of one of Patmore's poems. Neither can any lines quoted be definitely ascribed to Patmore's influence. The most that can be said is that they do conform to his principles, and we have Thompson's own words admitting that he based the New Poems on the principles that Patmore discovered. Thompson has used these principles with great understanding and success. Mégroz feels that they have hampered Thompson's spontaneity and "impoverished the orchestral texture" of his poems. Nothing could be more spontaneous than Thompson's use of meter in "The Dread of Height":

> Ah me!
> How shall my mouth content it with mortality?
> Lo, secret music, sweetest music,
> From distances of distance drifting its love flight,
> Down the arcane where Night would perish in night.[33]

That Thompson was sincerely convinced of the wisdom of these principles is shown in his criticism of the poetry of others in which he uses these principles as a basis. In criticizing some poems of Henley, Thompson wrote:

> They are in so-called "irregular" lyric
> metre, ebbing and flowing with the motion
> itself. Irregular it is not, though the

33 Ibid., II, 17.

> law is concealed. Only a most delicate response to the behests of inspiration can make such verse successful....the poet with this gift has a subtle sense of hidden metrical law, and in his most seeming-vagrant metres revolves always (so to speak) round a felt though invisible centre of obedience.[34]

Again he wrote in his notebook a reference to Patmore's ode meter, noting that the emotion controls the line. "Temporal variations of metre are responsive to the emotions, like the fluctuations of human respiration, which also varies indefinitely, under the passage of changeful emotions, and yet keep an approximate temporal uniformity."[35]

Perhaps the greatest and most easily discernible influence that Patmore had on Thompson's poetry was to persuade him to be more restrained in his use of imagery. Alice Meynell praised Patmore's restraint while at the same time she recognized that it did not make his poetry cold or ineffective. She wrote to him: "How Greek you must be. Sir Frederick said that temperance was Greek and who has it like you? But I suppose no Greek ever had your passion and power."[36] Patmore indeed did show Thompson that powerful and intense poetry could be written without resorting to violence of imagery. This was one of the poetic convictions that Patmore held from the earliest days of his poetic career. While he was still at the British Museum, he expounded them to Richard Garnett, who felt that he was aided in his

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34 E. Meynell, 133.
35 Ibid., 133.
36 V. Meynell, 112.

literary career by the advice of Patmore.

> All the faults to which a young writer is most prone found in him a severe censor and an unanswerable antagonist. The subordination of parts to the whole, the necessity of every part of a composition being in keeping with all the others, the equal importance of form with matter, absolute truth to nature, sobriety in simile and metaphor, the wisdom of maintaining a reserve of power--these and kindred maxims were enforced with an emphasis most salutary.[37]

This fault of excessive use of imagery elicited one of the few criticisms Patmore made of Thompson's poetry in his review of 1894. He praised the qualities of Thompson's poetry which made it great, but he felt that it was lacking in moderation and restraint of imagery.

> Profound thought, and far-fetched splendour of imagery and nimble-witted discernment of those analogies which are the 'roots' of the poet's language, abound; but in the feminine faculties of 'taste,' of emotion that must have music for its rendering, of shy moderation which never says quite so much as it means, of quickness to 'scent the ridiculous from afar,' of the dainty conscience which sets 'decorum' far above all other duties and knows that in poetry the manner is much more important than the matter, since manner is beautiful in itself, whereas, without it, it is no matter what matter may be since it fails to express itself with feminine <u>feeling</u> and perfection; in these qualities Mr. Thompson's poetry is often deficient.[38]

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37 R. Garnett, "Recollections of Coventry Patmore," <u>Saturday Review</u>, December 5, 1896, 582.

38 Patmore, "Francis Thompson," 160.

Patmore has indicated more than just a deficiency in restraint in the above quotation, but the emphasis in general is on moderation in expressing the thought of the poem. Patmore is not the only one who makes this criticism of Thompson's poetry. In the article on "The Younger Poets" written in 1895, the author says that Thompson's poetry was excessive

> ...in audacity of phrase, in far-fetched conceits, in coinage of new and strange words, in exuberance of figure and metaphor.

He goes on to caution Thompson to learn to master these faults or they will ruin his poetry.

> Everything depends upon this acquisition of artistic mastery over his materials if he can acquire taste and judgment, if he can tame the luxuriance of his fancy and keep his Pegasus under bridle.[39]

Another critic, overwhelmed "even to bewilderment" by metaphors and images that Thompson uses with abandon, wrote:

> Some discipline had to come; whether it was discipline of order, leading to solution, or the discipline of renunciation, leading to some form of asceticism.... But as Francis Thompson sang out his spiritual progress and discovery it is plain to see that he begins to take the way of renunciation and not of solution.[40]

Thompson, himself, was aware of this defect and he realized that Patmore was a model of moderation for him to follow. When a reviewer

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39 "The Younger Poets," 479.
40 Figgis, 37.

scornfully dismissed his poetry as being merely an imitation of Patmore's, Thompson wrote to Wilfrid Meynell in indignation:

> Call you this dealing favourably with a man? Heaven save me, then, from the unfavourable dealers! Of course, he is right about the 'To Monica Thought Dying'; but that and one or two other poems are not sufficient on which to base a charge of making Mr. Patmore a model. It would have been well, indeed, for the restraint and sanity of the poems if I had submitted somewhat to the influence of Mr. Patmore's example.[41]

In his later poems he did base his meter on Patmore's principles and in particular he showed greater restraint in the use of exotic language and images. He wrote in a note that he intended to be printed in New Poems but for some reason withheld:

> Of words I have coined or revived I have judged fit to retain but few; and not more than two or three will be found in this book. I shall be found, I hope, to have modified much the excessive loading both of diction and imagery which disfigured my former work.[42]

Thompson's passionate use of imagery was born of the intensity of his emotion and in learning to control his flow of words, he felt, at times, that he was stifling his inspiration. He wrote:

> I have greatly lost in fire and in glow;

but he realized that what he gained offset his loss:

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41 E. Meynell, 105.
42 Ibid., 115.

> From a higher standpoint I have gained,
> I think, in art and chastity of style.[43]

Thompson felt that his poetry was improved by the contact he had with Patmore's poetry, and it undoubtedly was. But Thompson is never content to leave his indebtedness unqualified. His poetry may echo Patmore's in meter, but it does not imitate it outright. Thompson's own individuality shaped that meter into something he could call his own. As Thompson himself said:

> Every poet makes accepted metre
> a quite new metre, imparts to it
> a totally new movement, impresses
> his own individuality upon it.[44]

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43 Ibid., 181.
44 Ibid., 133.

CHAPTER IV

PATMORE'S INFLUENCE ON THOMPSON'S PROSE

"It is good news that you are writing prose. You know how perfectly great I think what I have read of your prose. After all, the greatest things must be said in prose. Music is too weak to follow the highest thought."[1]

With this word of encouragement Patmore urged Thompson to devote his literary efforts to writing in prose. The above quotation is from a letter written in 1895, the year that Patmore's The Rod, The Root, and The Flower was published. Patmore had reached the peak of his prose writing and the final expression of his one theme, the human soul's attainment of union with God through love. In the preface to this book he presents his aim:

> My work is mainly that of the Poet, bent only upon discovering and reporting how the 'loving hint' of doctrine has 'met the longing guess' of the souls of those who have so believed in the unseen that it has become visible, and who have thenceforward found their existence to be no longer a sheath without a sword, a desire without fulfillment.[2]

Thompson had been writing prose, simultaneously with his poetry, since at least 1887. One of the first contributions to Wilfrid

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1 E. Meynell, 109.
2 Patmore, Mystical Poems, 151.

Meynell was the essay, "Paganism Old and New." Thompson's prose merited the approval of Patmore, who, according to Basil Champneys, "used to say that the young poet's prose was better than his poetry."[3]

The year after the above-quoted letter and soon after Patmore's death, Thompson stopped writing poetry and wrote almost exclusively in prose. Patmore, too, had ended his career by writing in prose for the last twelve years of his life. He was undoubtedly influenced in using this medium of expression by his conviction that his writing had to say something. In particular, he wanted to express spiritual truths, which, at times, soar too high for formal poetical expression. He wrote in Religio Poetae: "There is a poetic region--the most poetical of all--which is incapable of taking the form of poetry. Its realities take away the breath which would, if it could, go forth in song."[4] These truths must be set down in all simplicity, clothed only with the beauty of their truth. Patmore was likewise influenced by the belief that his power of poetic expression was deserting him, and he would not write poetry that he had to pry out of himself. His ideal of poetical integrity had always been high. As early as 1889, in his first prose work, Principle in Art, he had written:

> If, in the utterance of what he [the poet] offers to you as the cry or the deep longing of passion, you catch him in busily

3 Champneys, II, 133.
4 C. Patmore, Religio Poetae, 7.

> noticing trifles--for which very likely he gets praised for 'accurate observation of nature'--you will put him down as one who knows nothing of the passion he is pretending to express. If you detect him in the endeavour to say 'fine things' in order to win your admiration for himself, instead of rendering his whole utterance a single true think, which shall win your sympathy with the thought or feeling by which he declares himself to be dominated, the result will be the same.5

Patmore, in 1895, realizing the approaching end to his work, was happy to have a younger prophet to send forth in his stead. That he felt Thompson to be worthy of his confidence can easily be seen in the article he wrote on Thompson, in 1894.

> It is a sure sign, for those who want a sign, of the essential soundness of Mr. Thompson's highest spiritual and poetical flights that he can write prose replete with the great and universally acceptable common-sense of genius. Nearly all true poets have written prose admirably, and with eminent and manly insight into matters well within an ordinarily cultivated comprehension; but I have seldom read prose more simple in style and more weighted with great good sense than has appeared, from time to time, with Mr. Thompson's name, in two or three little-known periodicals.6

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5 C. Patmore, Principles in Art, George Bell and Sons, London, 1889, 60.
6 Patmore, "Francis Thompson," 166.

Thompson also thought that true poets could and should write prose. "It might almost be erected into a rule that a great poet is, if he please, also a master of prose."[7] Thompson goes further with this idea of poets writing prose and says:

> Far from the poets' being astray in prose-writing, it might plausibly be contended that English prose, as an art, is but a secondary stream of the Pierian fount, and owes its very origin to the poets.[8]

He bases this statement on the fact that Sir Philip Sidney, a poet, was the first to make prose-writing an art. Thompson wrote a series of essays on the prose of the poets in which he makes many illuminating statements about the art of prose. In general, he seems to feel that prose is inferior to poetry, but that writing prose is an aid to the poet's diction.

> Now, according to our theory, the practice of prose should maintain fresh and comprehensive a poet's diction, should save him from falling into the hands of an exclusive coterie of poetic words. It should react upon his metrical vocabulary to its beneficial expansion, by taking him outside his aristocratic circle of language, and keeping him in touch with the great commonalty, the proletariat of speech.[9]

Thompson does not seem to prove the truth of his statement in his own prose and poetry. He was writing prose and poetry simultaneously;

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7 Thompson, III, 153.
8 Ibid., 147.
9 Ibid., note on 5.

but the criticism frequently made of his poetry is that his words were artificial, archaic, foreign, exotic, and beyond the grasp of the commonalty.

Thompson recognized in Patmore's prose the same model of restraint and order that he found in Patmore's poetry. Thompson was not unaware of the defects of his prose. In fact, he was singularly lacking in confidence in himself and his writing. Of his essay on Shelley he wrote:

> It seemed to me dreadful trash when I read it over before sending it. Shut my eyes and ran to the post or some demon might have set me to work on picking it again.[10]

He recognized his excessive use of imagery in this essay: "It is written at an almost incessant level of poetic prose, and seethes with imagery like my poetry itself."[11] When Thompson read Patmore's prose, he realized the value of order and simplicity. He voices his appreciation in several articles:

> The difference between his [Patmore's] poems and his prose is strictly the difference between synthesis and analysis. What in the one is condensed in all the splendours of inclusive imagery, in the other, reappears set forth with almost scholastic plainness and severity—so far as the difficult subject-matter will admit.[12]

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10 A. J. Hogan, S.J., "The Master of Prose," Catholic World, November, 1915, 186.
11 E. Meynell, 77.
12 Thompson, Criticisms, 213-4.

In reviewing a book for the Academy Thompson noted that the author had evidently taken many of his points from Coventry Patmore. Then he continued: "I would that he had taken more; above all, Mr. Patmore's perspicuous sense of order, his pregnant condensation and concentration upon his subject."[13]

These are the qualities of Patmore's prose style that appealed to Thompson; and which, undoubtedly, he attempted to embody in his own prose. That his success in acquiring condensation and concentration in his writing is not too evident is shown by a reviewer of Thompson's Life of St. Ignatius, who writes:

> With a wealth of imagery, which sometimes even usurps the functions of poetry, he carries us smoothly on from one event of Ignatian history to another, scarcely giving us time for pause.

Further down the same page, however, he recognizes "the chastened and vivid English of a genius and a poet, who is, moreover, a master of prose."[14]

Mégroz explains the poetical nature of Thompson's prose by saying: "No intensely poetic mind produces prose into which poetry does not sometimes flow."[15]

Patmore's prose, also, has been described as:

> The prose of a poet; not prose 'incompletely executed' and aspiring after the 'nobler order' of poetry, but adequate and achieved prose of a very rare kind.[16]

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13 Ibid., 442.
14 Wilfrid Wilberforce, "Francis Thompson's 'Life of St. Ignatius'," Catholic World, January, 1910, 517.
15 Mégroz, 34.
16 Symons, 362.

In a review of Patmore's The Rod, The Root, and The Flower in the Athenaeum, although the book is written in prose, the reviewer wrote that fifty years after the publication of his first poems, Patmore still showed himself:

> ...happy possessor of much true poetic insight, and a master of some of the finer and rarer arts of poetic expression.

He goes on to say:

> He attains something of that exquisite distinction and that felicity of style which go to the making of a classic.[17]

A review of his earlier book, Religio Poetae, contains passages of similar criticism:

> There is absolutely no popular appeal, no extraneous interest in the timeliness of subject or the peculiarities of treatment... Yet, in many ways, it is one of the most beautiful and notable works in prose that have appeared in recent years.[18]

With regard to this comment on Patmore's prose, it is interesting to note what Mégroz says about Thompson's prose: "Unfortunately Thompson rarely used his creative gift in criticism. His prose is generally written for sale."[19]

Patmore, of course, at the prose-writing period of his life, was not under any financial strain and could write what he liked.

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17 "The Rod, The Root, and The Flower," Athenaeum, December 21, 1895, 862.
18 "Religio Poetae," Athenaeum, December 30, 1893, 902.
19 Mégroz, 46.

as he liked and when he liked. The one essay, Shelley, in which Thompson gave his emotion limitless expression was not accepted by the review that had commissioned it, and had to wait until after Thompson's death for publication.

The review of Religio Poetae goes on to describe his style, to praise its "gravity and sweetness, its fine, unforbidding austerity, its smooth harmony--a harmony produced by the use of simple words subtly."[20]

Patmore's works do not receive praise exclusively. The critics are quick to notice his tendency to be inconsistent and foolhardy in his insistence on his own point of view. The Athenaeum said:

> Mr. Patmore is inclined to be petulant, and he occasionally rides a hobby-horse so recklessly as to commit himself to incredible fallacies. But a book which attains perfection has never yet been produced, and Mr. Patmore's is close, very close indeed.[21]

C. L. Hind likewise criticizes Patmore's attitude at times; but he finishes as the Athenaeum did with praise for the author of so great a book.

> His essays are sometimes truculent; they have over-emphasis and over-statements, but they are always the expression of a sincere and beautiful character, not quite at home in the material.[22]

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20 "Religio Poetae," Athenaeum, December 30, 1893, 903.
21 Ibid., 903.
22 Hind, 242.

Thompson reviewed Religio Poetae for Merry England in September, 1893. His sympathetic and intelligent treatment of Patmore's ideas shows how close their thoughts were even before their personal friendship. Thompson expresses admiration for Patmore's indifference to the reception that awaits his ideas. Then he criticizes the style of the book:

> Mr. Patmore does not aim at 'appreciation,' but at the elucidation of principles. We may add a word as to the style of the book. It is severely pregnant to a degree which some will call bold. But we do not call a countenance 'bold' because it is rased of the 'excrement' (to speak Shakespeareanly), which hides the play of facial expression. He desires exposition, not the softer graces. Indeed, his subject matter is such, that the cultivation of beauty for beauty's sake would but obscure what is in itself difficult enough. The beauty of precision is the only legitimate beauty in such a case. Accordingly, imagery is used only for illustration or deeper expression. Few would see beauty in the style of Aquinas. Yet De Quincey justly says that St. Thomas's is a style admirably fitted to its peculiar purpose. Is not this the supreme justification of all style? Let it be the justification of Mr. Patmore's. One who has had a purely literary training, and has afterwards passed to the treatment of such subjects as occupy Religio Poetae, must have experienced a disagreeable surprise. He discovers that the style of literary beauty which had been the pride of his heart, is as useless for his new objects as a butterfly-net for deep-sea fishing.[23]

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23 Thompson, Criticisms, 211.

Thompson admired the simplicity and orderliness of Patmore's prose style; but another quality of the work was not as admirable, although Thompson is accused of being influenced by it to some extent. That is the aphoristic quality of his work. In general, Patmore has been accused of lacking powers of coordination and concentration to continue a work to its logical completion. Richard Garnett wrote: "His one principal work was an assemblage of detached beauties without true vital unity..."[24]

Thompson's notebooks are criticized as displaying this same aphoristic characteristic; although Thompson denies that Patmore's works are defective in this respect.

> His notebooks reflect Patmore's aphoristic habit. He himself defended or denied the 'fragmentary' nature of Patmore's book. It might as well be said that the heavens are fragmentary, because the stars are not linked by golden chains.[25]

Notebooks, since they are made up of jottings and random reflections, will necessarily lack unity. When Thompson's notebooks are given to the world, they will prove an invaluable source of information about his life and inmost thoughts. They have been called "his other self; his companions through many solitary years; his life-work and his library; they were the only things he never discarded."[26] Those who have had access to these notebooks have remarked on the number of references in them to Coventry Patmore and his works.

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24 Garnett, 62.
25 E. Meynell, 170.
26 "The Notebooks of Francis Thompson," Dublin Review, January, 1917, 109.

Patmore's critical prose has been criticized by many because of his frequent inability to make a sound judgment on the works of others. Richard Garnett said of his criticism:

> Although a poet, he was not an artist. I found the same inability to combine separate excellencies into a whole to pervade his criticism; his strictures on single passages were almost infallible but he seemed unable to obtain a just view of an author as a whole.[27]

Thompson wrote in regard to this defect in Patmore's criticism:

> If the judgments on individuals may often call for caveat and modification, the statements of general principle appear more sound to the roots the more they are meditated. This was characteristic of Coventry Patmore. He is not strong in 'appreciation,' but in philosophical analysis of artistic law his writings have a quite classic weight and permanence.[28]

Another reviewer notes that Patmore's criticisms:

> Show Patmore's extremism, his inability to view the field from all points. He lacks mental poise, and even while he advocates repose of manner he does so in words that tremble like leaves in an unseemly blast.[29]

Patmore's biographer, Sir Edmund Gosse, said of his judgment that he "had no perception of the sublime in other men's writings or of the ridiculous in his own."[30] Another of his contemporaries and critics, Arthur Symons, likewise found Patmore

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27 Garnett, 62.
28 Thompson, Criticisms, 218.
29 H. O'Keefe, "Coventry Patmore," Catholic World, August, 1899, 655.
30 Gosse, 185.

> ...singularly lacking in the critical faculty, even in regard to his own art; and this was because, in his own art, he was a poet of one idea and one metre. He did marvelous things with that one idea and that one metre, but he saw nothing beyond them; all thought must be brought into relation with nuptial love, or it was of no interest to him, and the iambic metre must do everything that poetry need concern itself about doing.[31]

Thompson surpassed Patmore in the art of criticism, although much of what he practices is based on Patmore's principles. Father Connolly describes Thompson's criticism:

> Learned, keen, and well-balanced, these criticisms are expressed in flawless prose—witty, racy, and, at times, sublime—that every week delighted readers of London's most important periodicals.[32]

C. Lewis Hind, the editor of one of the magazines to which Thompson contributed, had only praise for his work. Although Thompson frequently disappointed him because ill-health or absent-mindedness would prevent Thompson's making the dead-line, still, when Thompson did present his article, it was always extraordinary.

> A Thompson article in the Academy gave distinction to the issue. What splendid prose it was. Reading the proofs, we would declaim passages aloud for the mere pleasure of giving utterance to his periods.[33]

Not only these journalists appreciated the prose style of Thompson. William Ernest Henley said of him:

> Thompson's articles, which came in this morning, is quite masterly throughout. The worst I can say against it is, indeed,

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31 Symons, 367.
32 Thompson, Criticisms, vii.
33 E. Meynell, 196.

> that it anticipates some parts of my own terminal essay, so that I shall have to quote it instead of writing out of my own stomach. All manner of compliments to him and a thousand thanks. I know not which to admire the more; his critical intelligence or his intellectual courage.[34]

This critical intelligence is the quality in which Thompson surpassed Patmore. Thompson has shown "uncommonly keen discrimination, nice distinctions, scholarly and intimate knowledge of subjects under discussion."[35]

In particular, his essay on Shelley must be mentioned as one of the greatest ever written. The review in Athenaeum said of it:

> Thompson, using his own sure intuition, his opulent but ordered imagination, his sensitiveness to external reality, his delicate feeling for implicit emotion--all that has made him an artist, in short--has climbed cautiously up the thin-spun and elusive thread of Shelley's poetry.[36]

In this essay Thompson puts into practice some of the principles that he has gained from Patmore. He himself said in his review of Patmore's Religio Poetae: "For his first principles he relies on intuition, which, like all true poets and Platonists, he holds to be a higher reason."[37] This essay is certainly an overflowing of Thompson's intuitive appreciation of Shelley. Mégroz says of this essay and of Thompson's prose in comparison with Shelley's:

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34 Ibid., 200-1.
35 Sr. Madeleva, Chaucer's Nuns, D. Appleton and Co., New York, 1925, 56.
36 "Shelley," Athenaeum, April 24, 1909, 490.
37 Thompson, Criticisms, 212.

> Such vibrating imagery and expressive music indicate a certain poetic spontaneity and metaphorical wealth of thought. By the subservience of intellect to intuitive feeling their prose becomes largely a more explicit statement of the wisdom in their poetry.[38]

This essay is really renowned for the beauty of its imagery and the verbal music of its expression. Father Hogan, who calls Thompson "The Master of Prose," says of it:

> Throughout the whole essay, which is wonderful in its constructive insight, there is a vividness, a captivating vividness, a heaping of balance upon balance, beauty upon richness and richness upon beauty, until amidst all this profusion of exquisite language it really reaches its climax 'round the foot of the cross'.[39]

Mégroz adds: "There is heard a verbal music which is rare in his prose, and is often absent from the verse."[40]

It is true of Patmore's influence on Thompson's prose as well as on his poetry that his chief contribution was in the thought. Thompson found his principles to be very helpful and suggestive.

> Whether he is illuminatingly supporting the decried thesis that Bad morality is bad Art, crushing 'the fallacy that poetry appeals to the emotions only' (as most poetry of the day too unfortunately does), he is equally full of profound suggestion.[41]

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38 Mégroz, 34.
39 Hogan, 187.
40 Mégroz, 35.
41 Thompson, Criticisms, 211.

Patmore's prose contains for the most part the same ideas as are expressed in his poetry, as Gosse says "the raw material" of his poetry. A review of Religio Poetae calls it

> the sublimated love poetry of The Unknown Eros, with its extraordinary subtlety of thought and emotion, rendered with the faultless simplicity of an elaborate and conscious art.[42]

Gosse does not regret the loss of Patmore's "vanished masterpiece," Sponsa Dei which Patmore destroyed upon the advice of Gerard Manley Hopkins because of its subject-matter. Gosse regrets its loss because of its style.

> The Sponsa Dei, this vanished masterpiece, was not very long, but polished and modulated to the highest degree of perfection. No existing specimen of Patmore's prose seems to me so delicate, or penetrated by quite so high a charm of style, as this lost book was.[43]

Since it is lost no one can dispute the word of Gosse, who claims to have seen it several times while Patmore was writing it. We can thank Gosse for assuring us that nothing new to his doctrine of nuptial love was lost.

Sister Madeleva has written an interesting essay on Francis Thompson's prose, attempting to show that it is transitional from Coventry Patmore to G. K. Chesterton. From Patmore she sees reflected

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42 "Religio Poetae," Athenaeum, December 30, 1893, 903.
43 Gosse, 143.

in Thompson's prose, "mysticism and symbolism, epigrammatic style, boldness in choice and treatment of subject."[44] These qualities dominate Thompson's prose, but his treatment of them is slightly different in that he makes them more tangible.

> Where Patmore is obscure and abstract, Thompson is clear and concrete. Patmore theorized on the mystical religion of the poet; Thompson concretizes it in the canticles of St. Francis of Assisi; Patmore speaks of the relation of the First and Second Persons of God and the simultaneously proceeding Third Person; Thompson finds footprints of the Trinity in the marriage of Soul and Body and resulting Life.[45]

Another critic agrees with Sister Madeleva in saying that Thompson's prose was not obscure.

> His prose has been described as 'heroic'. Close-woven and vigorous, richly colored and melodious, it is completely free from the obscurities that make some of his poems so difficult.[46]

Not that Thompson found prose-writing always easy for him or to his liking. He compares prose and poetry with a nostalgic air, wistfully recalling the days when his poetic muse responded to his thought.

> Prose is clay; poetry the white, molten metal. It is plastic, not merely to gross touch, but to the lightest breath, a wish, a half-talent, an unconscious feather-passage of emotional suggestion. The most instantaneously perfect of all media for expression.

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44 Sr. Madeleva, 64.
45 Ibid., 73.
46 J. Philip, "A Poet of the Church," Catholic World, June, 1940, 324.

> Instant and easy as the snap of a camera,
> perfect as star in pool to star above,
> natural as breathing of sweet air, or
> drinking of rain-fresh odors; where
> prose asks a certain effort and conscious
> shaping. But prose can be put in shafts
> (to its slow spoiling); verse, alack!
> hears no man's bidding, but serves when
> it lists,--even when it consents to lay
> aside its wings.[47]

But, however dull and irksome Thompson found it at times to write his prose articles, they, nonetheless, always exhibit a careful scholarship and style that make them valued even today. Father Hogan said that these essays carry the reader along on a

> pleasurable tide of charm, strong charm,
> and it is precisely because of this
> quality that his writings have been
> styled persuasive--they are persuasive,
> gently so, leading us from thought to
> thought.[48]

These thoughts were often learned from Patmore, whose prose contained a "wonderful medley of religious ecstasy, poetical extravagance, scientific nomenclature, and metaphysical abstraction."[49]

That Thompson was aware of Patmore's literary criticism is very evident from his essay on Milton. In it Thompson uses many of Patmore's ideas and principles as a starting point for his own criticism. For example:

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47 E. Meynell, 245.
48 Hogan, 184.
49 "The Rod, The Root, and The Flower," Athenaeum, December 21, 1895, 862.

> Mr. Coventry Patmore considered Milton even a greater thaumaturge in words than Shakespeare. It is indisputable.... It is impossible to question another opinion of his, that the three chief fountains of wonderful diction are Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. 'What a mind he is of words!' he once exclaimed, regarding Spenser.[50]

Thompson gives us then Patmore's views on the meter used by Milton, giving us at the same time insight into the background of Patmore's own meter.

> Mr. Patmore remarks truly that from Spenser Milton derived even some of the metres thought to be peculiarly his own--for example, the metre of Lycidas.[51]

Thompson praises Patmore's capacity as metrical critic and links his name with that of his "beloved De Quincey."

> Of his blank verse he is still speaking of Milton two men alone could have written with full perception; both have left but slight and casual utterances. One was De Quincey, the other Coventry Patmore. Were the critic fool enough to rush in where the most gifted have feared to tread, not in journalistic summary could he analyze its colossal harmonies. Paradise Lost is the treasury and supreme display of metrical counterpoint. It is to metre what the choruses of Handel are to music.[52]

Thompson, here pays tribute to Patmore's understanding of meter; but, in general, Thompson benefitted more by his spiritual thoughts.

> Mr. Patmore is best in the serener ether of contemplation. It is here that he proves himself a man of deep religious instinct.[53]

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50 Thompson, III, 199-200.
51 Ibid., III, 200.
52 Ibid., III, 201.
53 O'Keefe, 657.

His instinctive knowledge of God raised Thompson's vision. Patmore had written:

> Let it be remembered that we become what we look upon; therefore, 'whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'[54]

Thompson followed this advice; and when he wrote of what he had gazed upon, he frequently found that Patmore had preceded him in expressing it. In a letter to Patmore he wrote:

> In a fragment of a projected article I had written of 'poets born with an instinctive sense of veritable correspondences hidden from the multitude'... Now if you turn to your own Religio Poetae, you will see of what I accuse you. Masters have privileges, I admit, but I draw the line at looking over their pupils' shoulders various odd leagues away.[55]

Again we see Thompson's willingness to be called a "pupil," even in prose-writing, of the "master" whose work he so admired and found so "full of profound suggestion."

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54 Patmore, Courage, 132.
55 Sr. Madeleva, 72.

CONCLUSION

In the evaluation of the evidences of influence shown in the preceding chapters, the fact which is emphasized over and over is the elusive quality of influence. Influence cannot be definitely ascribed to a certain poem or meter or phrase, but must constantly be qualified; recognition must be given to the originality of the poet. Originality, as Patmore wrote,

> consists simply in a man's being upon his own line; in his advancing with a single mind towards his unique apprehension of good.[1]

Thompson never violated this singleness of vision, but he congratulated himself upon finding a companion whose vision was along the same line as his. He readily acknowledged any influence that he realized he received from Patmore because to do so he did not need to be false to his own inspiration. Because he knew that he was faithful to his ideal of poetic integrity, he could admit the encouragement he received from Patmore.

Not only from Patmore, but from all of the poets, did Thompson cull thoughts and inspiration.

> Mr. Thompson is the heir of the poets, and he has entered fully into his inheritance. He has not picked their flowers and worn

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1 Patmore, Principle, 68.

> them fading; their seed has passed into his life, and they have blossomed anew. He does not imitate them, rather have they moulded him. No mere echo is he of any of them, although their voices are heard in his. This, of course, we say of style and method mostly. In vision and judgment he is himself even when he is most Coventry Patmore's chosen disciple.[2]

Undoubtedly their common religion, and the important part it played in their writing, was a dominating factor in their favorable reaction to one another. H. D. Traill, whose review of Thompson's poems was one that pleased Thompson, wrote:

> The formative influence of the poet's religious faith is very strongly felt in his poetry. Some of the pieces, indeed, are permeated with that intensely, that almost 'denominationally' Catholic feeling, if I may risk offense in so describing it, which gives power and beauty, though occasionally at the same expense of breadth, to the work of a distinguished member of the same communion, Mr. Coventry Patmore.[3]

That Coventry Patmore influenced Francis Thompson is, to me, clearly beyond doubt. Not one of the reviews, which I read, of Thompson's New Poems was without some mention of Coventry Patmore's influence. Even many of the reviews of Thompson's Poems, written at an earlier date, contain references to Patmore, and one speaks of "down-right imitation of Mr. Patmore." This same reviewer expressed the feeling that Thompson was hurting his own

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2 "Mr. Thompson's New Poems," Academy, May 22, 1897, 538.
3 H. D. Traill, "Mr. Thompson's Poems," Nineteenth Century, February, 1894, 229.

poetic technique by imitating Patmore.

> That a writer who at his best is so fiery and exuberant should ever take Mr. Patmore for a model, should really try to catch even his tricks of expression, is very curious, and shows, as much as any other single characteristic, the somewhat external quality of Mr. Thompson's inspiration.[4]

The inference here that Thompson was somewhat lacking in interior inspiration is unfair to Thompson and evoked from him a protest against "unfavorable criticism." It also accuses Thompson of possessing the fault, which he so vigorously denounced in the writers of his own generation.

> The defect is the predominance of art over inspiration, of body over soul. We do not say the defect of inspiration. The warrior is there, but he is hampered by his armour. Writers of high aim in all branches of literature even when they are not--as Mr. Swinburne, for instance, is--lavish in expression, are generally over-deliberate in expression.... This results in loss of spontaneity.[5]

In undertaking this study of influence the answers to several questions as to its extent and nature were sought. The influence was exerted both through Patmore's works and through the personal friendship of the two poets. That Thompson was acquainted with Patmore's prose and poetry has been shown by his own words in letters and articles

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4 "Poems by Francis Thompson," Athenaeum, February 3, 1894, 143.
5 Thompson, III, 4-5.

and by the frequent quotations, both direct and indirect, of Patmore's words and ideas. The problem has been made much more evident by Thompson's own words of indebtedness to Patmore. What would ordinarily be a subject of much study and conjecture, because of Thompson's acknowledgement is accepted as an evidence of Patmore's influence. Thompson has acknowledged Patmore's influence on his meter and his diction; he has admitted asking for guidance in the matter of symbolism and subject-matter; he has confessed discipleship in the writing of prose. What could a writer do more in the interests of intellectual honesty? In the face of these acknowledgements it is amazing that Thompson retained his own individuality and originality, and very few of the reviewers criticize him as a mere imitator. One such criticism must have hurt Thompson, though, because it came from Alice Meynell. She criticized some of the New Poems, in particular "The Dread of Height," as making the influence of Patmore "too evident." In general, however, she was pleased with the restraining effect Patmore's influence had on Thompson's excessive use of imagery and diction.

Patmore, himself, did not find fault with Thompson's works in this regard.

> Yet there is nothing in his little book
> which can rightly be charged with plagiarism.
> The ideas, and to a certain extent, the
> language and style, of true poets become

> the common property of the guild, and all that is demanded of them is, that they should improve or vary what they have taken from each other, so as, in some sort, to make it their own. The greatest poets, and, indeed, the greatest artists of all sorts, have been the greatest plagiarists.[6]

One of Thompson's chief debts to Patmore is for material. He used the mystical themes supplied by Patmore. Thompson knew Patmore in his prophetic old age when his intuitions, especially in spiritual matters, were far-reaching. Patmore surpassed Thompson "in keenness of intellect, in penetration of purely mental vision."[7] But Thompson's genius was lyrical; his glory was in "intricate melodiousness and poppied warmth of symbolism."[8] Patmore does not show the same fiery passion that animates Thompson's poetry through rich imagery and violent diction. Thompson ascribes the fact that he somewhat restrained his imagery in his later poems not to Patmore's style but to the subject-matter that he learned from Patmore. His biographer tells us:

> He writes with Patmore in his mind. There are some truths so true, that upon everyone who sees them clearly they force almost the same mode of expression; they create their own formulas.[9]

Thompson gained much from the "oceanic vast of intellect" that he admired so much. Perhaps, most of all, he was encouraged to dare to break the conventions of his day and write from the convictions of

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6 Patmore, "Francis Thompson," 159.
7 C. M. Lewis, "Francis Thompson," Yale Review, October, 1914, 106.
8 Ibid., 108.
9 E. Meynell, 126.

his heart. Thompson places Patmore in the company of Dante, disdainful of his nineteenth century contemporaries.

> A space his alien eye surveyed the pride
> Of meditated pomp, as one that much
> Disdained the sight, methought; then, at a touch,
> He turned the heel, and sought with shadowy stride
> His station in the dim,
> Where the sole-thoughted Dante waited him.[10]

In spite of all that has been said of the influence which Thompson eagerly acknowledged and Patmore happily admitted, no one can deny the individuality of Thompson's genius. Patmore sums it up beautifully both as to the extent of the encouragement they received from each other's works, and their exalted idea of poetical integrity.

> I see, with joy, how nearly we are upon the
> same lines, but our visions could not be true
> were they quite the same; and no one can really
> see anything but his own vision.[11]

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10 Thompson, II, 139.
11 E. Meynell, 165.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Carolyn McGinty, C.S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

June 1, 1949
Date

Norman Weyand S.J.
Signature of Adviser